FOUR FAMOUS GREEK PLAYS

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FAMOUS GREEK
PLAYS

Edited with an introduction by

Professor PAUL LANDIS

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INTRODUCTION

The Greek drama is the most convincing testimony we have to the fact that great literature is timeless and there fore always modern Homer carries a still greater burden of years and Sappho s songs have come to us in scarred and jagged fragments like the remains of buried statues but one was a simple story directly told of war and the beauty of women and the love of friends and family and the other a passionate cry from a woman s heart These are permanently moving things and in Homer and Sappho there is little of the debris of bygone literary conventions to hide the treasure The drama is different It too tells stories of elemental human passions but it must speak to us across twenty five hundred years not only in a language that for half that time has been a stranger to the lips of man it must speak also through an art form more foreign to us than even its names and stories

The dramatic is peculiar among literary forms in the strength of the conventions which it develops conventions upon which the author leans for support and by which he is limited in the exercise of his genius The dramatist instead of speaking directly to his reader must depend upon a group of actors to present his story to the audi ence also in the group Unless therefore he is writing a closet-drama —and the Greeks never did—the author must govern himself always by the circumstances surround ing the performance of his piece Chief among these are the occasion when the play is to be performed and the

architectural characteristics of the theatre A proper appreciation of Shakespeare demands some knowledge of the Elizabethan theatre and the French stage of the seventeenth century is part of the art of Corneille and Racine We accept the conventions of our own time without thinking of them but the influence of these circumstances is just as strong upon Eugene O'Neill as on all his predecessors

The four great Attic dramatists whose works have come down to us Aeschylus Sophocles Euripides and Aristophanes all flourished during the fifth century before Christ Aeschylus at the age of forty five fought in the battle of Salamis in 480 Sophocles as a boy of fifteen took part in the celebration of the victory and tradition has it that Euripides was born on the very day of the battle Aristophanes the last of the writers of old comedy was born about the middle of the century and since the three tragic poets lived to a great old age all four were practically contemporaries nearly twenty five hundred years ago Naturally the conditions under which they wrote at that far time require some explanation today

We know relatively little about the theatre in the great age of Greek drama—all of the Greek theatres which remain were built long after the dramatists here represented had died We do know however that it was an open air theatre its only roof the blue Aegean sky its only spot the clear Aegean sunlight Perhaps it was for this reason that the scene of all Greek plays was laid out of doors Directly behind the stage—not a raised platform probably but simply levelled ground—stood a temple through which the actors went inside but all the action which took place in the temple or palace was reported on the stage Now and then the audience was made directly aware of what was happening within as when in *Agamemnon* the death

cry of the king is heard from behind closed doors and a moment later Clytemnestra appears in the doorway holding the dripping knife But we are never shown an interior scene This condition made it necessary for the authors to represent only such scenes as could plausibly take place out of doors Certainly much more of Athenian life was carried on in the open than we should judge from our own but even so this condition had a definite effect upon the choosing and handling of the story Another effect of the outdoor theatre was that the aud ence was large—perhaps as much as ten or fifteen thousand—and widely diffused consequently the action presented on the stage had to be simple and impressive rather than swift and complicated In the Athenian theatre the finesse of gesture to which we are accustomed would have been obscured by distance, and words spoken in rapid or violent action would never have reached their hearers So used do we become to our own theatrical conventions that we are likely to overlook the fact that the Athenian stage had no curtain yet without that simple appliance most of our plays could never be presented Without curtain or wings or fly scene shifting was a difficult if not impossible matter and dramatists therefore developed the convention of representing all action as taking place in one spot—what we have come to call the unity of place When we wish to indicate a lapse of time we lower the curtain The Greek dramatist faced the same problem in presenting his action but he could not use the same solution Without a curtain his play had to go on and he uses the chorus to cover the lapse of time with song and dance In *Agamemnon* for instance tween the announcement of the herald and the the king several days elapse while the chorus its ode.

But this mechanical use of the chorus was only a de veloped function Actually the chorus was the heart of the Greek play and since it is the element strangest to our modern experience something more must be said about it.

The great Greek religious festivals were those which were solemnized at seed time and harvest in honor of Demeter and Dionysos the one the goddess of grain and the other the god of wine It was a pagan worship which sprang not from a sense of sin but from a desire to propitiate and thank these two divinities who represented the chief forces of nature There was about it therefore the seriousness which belongs to any honest religion but there was also a gaiety in its celebration which we do not naturally associate with worship and from these two spirits as they were expressed in religious exercises grew tragedy and comedy The central element in these festivals was the choral song and dance which might be either grave and impressive or riotously gay From the gradual addi tion of first an interlocutor for the chorus then a story to furnish the substance of the song and finally of another actor so that the story might be brought out by dialogue evolved the dramatic form At first the play was built about the chorus as in *The Suppliants* of Aeschylus where the chorus of the fifty daughters of Danaus is the protago nist of the drama Later the chorus was fitted into the story In *Agamemnon* it is made up of the old men who had been left at home when the Greeks set out for Troy They have seen the changes wrought by the rule of Cly temnestra and they feel the imminence of danger to the state but in the impotence of their age and station they are helpless The chorus of Oedipus is formed of the plague stricken citizens of Thebes whose troubles set Oedipus to inquire into his history and in whose interest

he brings about his own ruin Gradually the chorus de clined in importance until in the last plays of Euripides and Aristophanes it is distinctly secondary but the real Greek drama could not exist without it These lyric passages express not only the spirit of the occasion but the attitude towards life which the chief actors in the story illustrate dramatically

This rapid summary of the circumstances surrounding the Greek drama of the fifth century B.C may help to make the form more intelligible, but the strangeness remains The Greek play was written in poetry whereas the natural vehicle for ours is prose its action was simple and impressive, whereas ours tends to be complicated and subtle it was severely limited as to the number of actors and changes of scene whereas we are very free in both respects it was carried on by means of long speeches with little movement we use shorter more natural speeches and freer movement and finally the Greek play was built about a chorus for which we have no counterpart whatever With this knowl edge the plays may be more effective as plays but if the Attic drama could not speak to us without our recon structing an entirely different civilization it would be an interesting relic but in no sense a living voice in modern life

The permanent appeal of the Attic drama arises from the fact that it presents with the vividness of the greatest art an attitude towards life at once so honest and so intelligent that the minds of men however far they may be deceived by fancy or philosophy must always return to it at the end By virtue of something that looks almost like racial genius the Athenians of the fifth century succeeded in looking upon life with a level gaze They faced it neither with bravado and bluster nor with fear and trembling not

with an ignorant assumption of power over it nor with an equally ignorant and cowardly feeling of inferiority They found it not always pleasant in fact more often it was a dark uncertain battle with the odds against them Ah! What is mortal life? sings the chorus in *Agamemnon*

When prosperous
A shadow can o erturn it and when fallen
A throw of the wet sponge blurs the picture out

And again

Who but a god goes woundless all the way?

But they do not seek to escape the danger nor complain of the unequal struggle nor delude themselves with dreams They accepted life as they found it, not as good or evil but as a fact and if they questioned it was How? not Why? They took their plots from old time legends of the lives of men and in their dramas they presented life not as it should be but as it was and is Their heroes may be good or evil but the poets are not deluded with a belief in poetic justice There is no nobler character in literature than Antigone but her very nobility drives her to destruction Nor are men made good or evil by force of circumstance Circumstance may force the tragedy but the characters are good or evil in their reaction to the circumstances and the circumstances themselves are not criticized they are presented It is a common belief that fate dominates the Greek drama and that consequently it does not portray men and women as free moral agents Nothing could be farther from the truth The Greeks recognized as we in our moments of wisdom also recognize that the outcome

of man s life is determined by circumstances over which he has no control but the virtue of his character is a matter quite apart from this and altogether his own affair The murder of Agamemnon is part of the fulfillment of the curse on the house of Atreus but Clytemnestra is evil of herself not made so by fate The fall of Oedipus is the fulfillment of a prophecy but Oedipus in his reaction to the circumstances shows himself a good man

In this courageous acceptance of life as it is the Greeks succeeded in uniting the passion for truth and the sense of wonder with a completeness to which our only modern parallel is the truly great scientific mind which will have nothing but truth and knows that to find truth it must accept not judge the facts of nature The natural result of this honest intellectualism was a serenity of spirit that brings to the end of the most terrible of Greek tragedies not consolation indeed but calm of mind all passion spent Honest intellectualism and its attendant simplicity and serenity these are the spiritual content of the four Athenian dramatists but their manifestation is different with each poet

Aeschylus is the oldest and perhaps the noblest of the dramatists whose word has been preserved Certainly he is the most severe and in *Agamemnon* he has presented his story with a dramatic intensity that has never been surpassed in the history of literature Nowhere except in the boding beauty of the first scene of *Hamlet* is there another such opening scene as that which discovers just before the dawn the watchman keeping his year long vigil upon the Atridae s tower In a few packed lines he runs the gamut of his emotions during the years of watching and

at the end there flashes on his tired eyes the beacon which tells that Troy is taken at last He summons the house but his joy is dimmed by premonitions of disaster and the chorus of old men as it recalls the events of the years of waiting finds it hard to let the happier note prevail Clytemnestra enters queenly and ominous and the passionate imagery with which she traces the flash of the beacon from headland to headland even her honeyed words to the herald and the chorus increases our sense of a tremendous power not all for good Even the triumphant Agamemnon scents disaster in the magnificence of his reception and the wailing figure of the captive Cassandra has scarcely vanished down the crimson carpet when to the trembling chorus comes the death-cry of the king Here is the climax of the action but we have yet to see the consummation of evil as Clytemnestra knife in hand stands in the doorway taunting the old men and boasting of her crime A gorgeous setting action swift and terrible and tremendous poetry all in the shadow of the great Aeschylean idea that

> The issue of impious deeds is evil still
> With plenteous increase like to like succeeding"

By the original crime of Atreus in feeding Thyestes a banquet of his own children the race is wedded to calamity but the judgment of the chorus is against Clytemnestra

> The offence is thine
> Whatever spirit of hoarded recompense
> From elder ages may have wrought with thee

Evil breeds evil is the eternal law but under it the human character is morally responsible Aeschylus presented men

and women acting under what to him was the fundamental law of life there is criticism of the characters but no attempt to explain or justify the law

In the drama of Sophocles Aeschylus younger contemporary is represented the highest degree of Greek detachment He sat, says Tennyson like a god holding no form of creed yet contemplating all He is not primarily concerned with the laws that govern life With him the first interest is man—

> Many wonders there be but naught more wondrous than man —

and man he represents not in vindication of any moral law, *but as in his strength and weakness he steers his course* through the dark waters of experience It may or may not be his fault that he is caught in an eddy and sucked down—that is of little consequence—what matters is that he hold his helm steady The end may be ruinous but it is often glorious Sophocles knew that life is as pitiless to ignorance as it is to wickedness and like a true Greek he finds no fault with the fact He may present man as the helpless victim of an unjust universe but his purpose is to permit us to contemplate the eternal wonder of humanity as Pope later described it

> The glory jest and riddle of the world

Oedipus as has been said is a good man he has shown himself a wise king and with the noblest intentions he pulls down the sky upon his own head We who know the whole story before he does tremble with expectancy as step by step he gathers the forces for his own destruction and when finally blind and mad with blood streaming

from his sightless sockets he rushes from the scene we sit transfixt at the malevolent power of circumstance and the awful capacity of the human soul for suffering Horror there is and pity but there is also admiration and most of all there is wonder staggering wonder at man and the ways of man in life Ibsen in *Rosmersholm* used the same sort of plot and there too the unravelling of the past drives the present action to disaster but with what a difference Always with Ibsen society is the villain there is something wrong with the universe Sophocles has no complaint to make there is nothing wrong there is only what is and that his play presents

With Euripides the last of the three there comes another and greater change Like Sophocles he found no law but he was worried about it and his plays are a passionate vindication of man Where Aeschylus presented the vindication of the moral law and Sophocles the wonder and mystery of man Euripides plead man s cause against the forces that destroy him *Medea* is the story of a woman wronged Her story is interesting because she is interesting not as it is the story of mankind It was the nature of Greek tragedy to present heroic but typical characters in extraordinary but typical crises Medea is a strange exotic woman in a trying situation and her solution is entirely her own Hers is perhaps the most terrible display of passion in literature but it lacks the universality characteristic of Greek drama The old Greek tragedy was clearly changing in the hands of Euripides and that no doubt accounts for his contemporary failure—he won only five first prizes in a long life notwithstanding that he was ranked as the first poet in Greece His reward has been to become the most popular Greek dramatist to modern readers

With Aristophanes we have another end but for us he is also a beginning He was the last of the writers of the old comedy and he is the only one whose work has been preserved The old comedy of Athens is tragedy with a *grinning face not that it is burlesque of the great themes* or even structurally resembles tragedy but Greek comedy is simply that same honest intellectualism used in the interests of laughter

Comedy by its very nature is intellectual The comic muse had reason for her handmaid as the tragic muse has passion One can feel without thinking—in fact one usually does—but one cannot recognize an incongruity even of the most obvious sort without the exercise of reason It is only natural that when the comic spirit took hold of a people as intellectual as the Athenians of the fifth century it raised peals of laughter such as have rarely been heard since It was another aspect of their passion for truth that the comic spirit should be free Nothing and no one was safe from it war and philosophy poets statesmen tradesmen slaves and women of every variety were victims of the jibes of Aristophanes He did not hesitate to smother with ridicule the greatest man in Athens or the last solemn undertaking of the state He is the spirit of Dionysos wine and spring and the riotous joy of the free creative impulse, and his only serious purpose is to raise a laugh His comedy is intellectual but it makes no snobbish pretense He knew that slapstick is funny and that there can be a hearty laugh without viciousness in a lewd situation and he used both with a verve and audacity that sweeps away all moral objections With all his coarseness there is not a speck of moral pollution in Aristophanes He is the great mind at play turning the world upside down for the fun of it as Rabelais did but all with a polished art

to which Rabelais was a stranger We cannot produce in English the lyric beauty of his verse but he is the supreme example of *the master poet turned clown* Monkeys and nightingales in the tree tops has been given as the symbol of his spirit for us the antics of the monkeys remain but only the faintest echo of the song of the bird

This is the message of the Attic drama—this honest intellectualism this passion for truth this serene and level gaze on life—and this has always been the modern spirit *For seven hundred years ever since the first glimmer of the* Renaissance, great spirits here and there have been struggling to make it prevail It is the struggle to free the intellect *to tear from it the veils of hope and fear so that it* may look clearly and unafraid upon the face of life and know it as it is terrible and pitiful and glorious and utterly nonsensical Once for a short time in Athens twenty five hundred years ago this vision was achieved and from that brilliant age rise the tragic figures of kings and queens to show what men saw in it the stifled cry of Agamemnon from behind the palace doors Cassandra praying for the fate of the ever mournful nightingale blind Oedipus once more a king at heart walking out alone from Colonus to vanish from the world and lest the spirit of man grow too proud with the dignity of sorrow from the reeds along the river Styx comes the mocking chorus of the Frogs

Paul Landis

Urbana, Illinois
January 1929

PERSONS OF THE DRAMA

A Watchman
CHORUS *of the Argive Elders*
CLYTEMNESTRA
Herald
AGAMEMNON
CASSANDRA
AEGISTHUS

SCENE—Argos before the palace of the Atridae.

TIME—After the fall of Troy

ARGUMENT

Argos is still the metropolis of Hellas and the palace is occupied by the two sons of Atreus Agamemnon and Menelaus as joint kings They have married sisters Clytemnestra and Helene daughters of Tyndareus But Helen has been carried off by Paris and the two brothers are described as having together departed on the Trojan expedition But the fleet was delayed at Aulis and Agamemnon was induced to sacrifice his daughter Iphigenia or Iphianassa This act has awakened an inextinguishable hatred in the breast of her mother Clytemnestra who remains in sole possession of the vast palace of the P lopidae—that home which has already witnessed the banquet of Thyestes and other nameless iniquities She sends away her son Orestes and amongst the horror breathing silences remains alone possessed with the one thought the one constant resolve to take condign vengeance for her child

But while alone in the palace she is not alone in her desire of revenge Aegisthus the son of Thyestes is bound in honour to be avenged for his brothers whom Atreus massacred He has returned to Argolis but is still an outcast from the palace of the Pelopidae

During the absence of Agamemnon and Menelaus these two hatreds have coalesced in one —Clytemnestra reckless of all but vengeance Aegisthus likewise loving revenge but not insensible to the charms of the kingdom and the Queen

Their plot is favoured by the circumstance that when Agamemnon returns his brother Menelaus is still absent having been intercepted by a violent storm Although suspicion is rife there has been no overt act either of adultery

or usurpation But after one of his secret visits Aegisthus has left with Clytemnestra his sword (Choeph 1008)

After entangling her husband in the rich hangings or carpetings over which she has persuaded him to walk in ent ring the palace the Queen dispatches him with the sword of Aegisthus

The King had brought home with him Cassandra the daughter of Priam This insult serves to whet the Queen s revenge And the character of the prophetic maiden her destined victim stands in pathetic contrast to that of the royal murderess

The King s death shriek is of course the crisis of the play and more than justifies the gloomy presentiments which damp all attempts at cheerfulness on the part of the Watch man the Chorus and the Herald For this culminating horror the mind of the spectator has been further prepared first by certain lurid flashes of Clytemnestra s demoniac joy and then by a scene in which the growing apprehension of the event is mingled with the most poignant tenderness of pity as Cassandra the captive princess whom Apollo has in pired and forsaken prophetically describes both the past abominations of the house of Atreus and the cruel doom that is immediately impending over Agamemnon and her elf.

AGAMEMNON

WATCHMAN

I ASK the gods deliverance from the toil
Of these long watchings Through twelve weary moons
Couched on the Atridae s house top like a dog
With head on hand and ever wakeful eye
I have conned the nightly concourse of the stars
That shine majestical in yon clear heaven
And by their risings and their settings bring
Summer and winter to the world To-night
I watch for the flame signal that shall tell
To us in Argos tidings borne from Troy
Voicing her capture Such the strong command
Of an expectant passionate man souled woman
This bed of mine beneath the dews of night
Conduces not to rest Dreams come not near it
Else they are warned off by the sentinel Fear
That will not let my lids securely close
Then if I whistle or soothe a tune providing
Such antidote gainst slumber my sad heart
Checks me with groans for the calamities
That haunt this house—not guided for the best
As once it was—Well! may the nightly flame
Soon with glad news release me from my toil

[*The beacon is seen*

All hail! thou light in darkness harbinger
Of day indeed author of many a song

And dance in Argos born of this event!
Sola solá!
I cry aloud to Agamemnon s queen
That from her couch she spring with speed and raise
Clamour of joy to hail this beacon light
For Troy is taken so the fires declare
Nay I ll begin and dance by way of prelude
Marking my master s game I ll cry Huzza!
Good luck! Three sixes thrown by Bonfire blaze!
Good luck do I say? Twill be some joy to hold
The kind hand of this kingdom s lord in mine
Beyond that I am silent A strange weight
Oppresses heart and tongue Could the house speak,
It might have much to tell My lips will open
With my good will only to those that know

CHORUS (*entering*)

Nine years are gone and the tenth is here
Since he whom Priam had cause to fear
Menelaus wreaking a mighty wrong
And Agamemnon in glory strong
With twofold sceptre and throne secure
Gifted by Him whose gifts are sure—
Two sons of Atreus leagued in power
Of Argive youth led forth the flower
Well armed for aid the Aegean o er
In a thousand ships from yonder shore

Shouting they went with hearts aflame
For the furious War god s eager game
Like eagles that over their eyrie wheel,
Driven wide by the sudden pang they feel
For their eaglets torn from the long watched nest,

Oaring their path in wild unrest
With pens for oar-blades—till one on high
Pan or Apollo hearing the cry
Of the birds who tenant his realm of air
Is moved by the sound of their shrill despair
And sends on the sinner albeit too late,
To redress that wrong an avenging fate

So mightier Zeus who guards the home
From outrage of guests that idly roam
Gainst Paris both the Atridae brought
For a woman whose marriage vows were naught,
Broaching a flood of toils to flow
For Greek and Trojan with equal woe—
When the knee outwearied should press the dust,
And the spear be snapped in the virgin thrust—
Each hour hath proof of the daily state
But the end shall be as tis ruled by Fate
No late libation or incense fume
Avails to save from a ruthless doom
The man who has angered through mad desire,
The Powers that burn but need no fire
Now we discarded through Time s decay
Dropt from the roll that mustering day
Remain supporting as weakness craves
Our child like gait upon walking staves
For the sap that sprang in our breasts of yore
Knows of his youthful might no more
And the warlike spirit hath left his seat.
What task for withering Eld is meet?
Doting he wanders his three foot way
Proving such valour as children may
Of no more strength than a dream in the day

But thou Clytemnestra royal dame
What cause hath kindled thine altar flame?
What new hath fallen? What tid ngs heard
With sudden motion thy heart have stirred
To raise by thy missives ranging wide
Frankincense fuming on every side?
Of all the gods that in Argos dwell
Gods of Olympus and gods of Hell
Gods of the palace gods of the street
Gods who preside where the people meet,
Where er is harboured a power divine
Thy gifts are blazing at every shrine
Here there and yonder on high doth spire
With holy meaning the fragrant fire
Fed with rich oils that mildly soothe
Our doubtful hearts with warrant of truth
Since the royal perfume with potent spell
From the palace whispers that all is well—
Whate er thou mayest to our minds reveal
O queen of thy bounty and timely heal
Our heart s foreboding that riseth still
One while with thoughts of impending ill
Till Hope appearing with kindly light
From the altar greets our reviving sight
And strives to banish the carking care
That fiercely feeds on the soul s despair

Full power is mine to sing what heartening sign
  Ushered the flower of warriors on their way —
Yet soars my spirit yet from springs divine,
  Life yields me valour to uplift the lay
      Telling how on a day
The king of birds marshalled two kings of men,—

Joint leaders of the youth of Hellas then
On ship-board led against the Teucrian land
With store of vengeance in each spear armed hand —
A warlike sign! Two eagles on the right
Full in the army s sight
Hard by yon royal roof they took their place
(One black in all his plumes one flecked with white)
Gorging together on a brooding hare,
O ertaken in her latest chase
A creature of despair!
Then be your burden sad with sounds of wail
But let the happier note prevail

The careful prophet saw the Atridae twain
And straightway in the hare-devourers scanned
Those warlike leaders with their differing strain
Then thus he spake prophetic Yonder band
In time shall take the land
Of royal Priam and the public store
Wherewith the towers of Troy were filled before,
Stern fate through violent shocks of armed power
Shall pitilessly ransack and devour
Only may no offence from Heaven distain
The bridle of Ilion s plain
That brilliant army crossed by heavenly ire!
Since holiest Artemis with wrath o erta en
Frowns as they feast on yon poor trembler s brood
Those winged minions of her Sire
She abhors the eagles food
Then be your burden sad with sounds of wail
But let the happier note prevail

'The beauteous goddess, though so kind
To eanlings of the ravening lion race,

And tender sucklings of all beasts of chase
Doth yet accord her mind
To fair fulfilment of the favouring sign
Ah! but on Phoebus yet I call
Healer in dangers all
Lest for the Argives with intent malign
She raise contrarious winds of dire delay
Minded another victim to exchange
In sacrifice unauthorized and strange
Attended with no festival
Breeding dark strife within the hall
Hardening the wife against the husband s sway
A mindful keeper of the house shall burn
To avenge her offspring at her lord s return
Such words of doom mingled with fortunate things
Calchas outspake touching our race of kings
Then be your burden sad with sounds of wail
But let the happier note prevail

Zeus—by what name soe er
He glories being addressed
Even by that holiest name
I name the Highest and Best
On Him I cast my troublous care
My only refuge from despair
Weighing all else in Him alone I find
Relief from this vain burden of the mind

One erst appeared supreme
Bold with abounding might
But like a darkling dream
Vanished in long past night
Powerless to save and he is gone
Who flourished since in turn to own

His conqueror to whom with soul on fire
Man crying aloud shall gain his heart s desire,—

Zeus who prepared for men
The path of wisdom binding fast
Learning to suffering In their sleep
The mind is visited again
With memory of affliction past
Without the will reflection deep
Reads lessons that perforce shall last
Thanks to the power that wields the sovran oar
Resistless toward the eternal shore

And the elder leader then
Of all the Achaeans blaming not
The prophet but with quivering lips
Bending his spirit to the strain
Of that unlooked for adverse lot—
What time the Achaeans by their ships
Were sore distressed with anxious thought
By baffling winds that drained that opulent host
Storm stayed on Aulis weary coast

For fronting Chalkis bay
Helpless as logs the Achaean galleys lay
While blasts of dire delay from Strymon s mouth
Authors of hunger weariness and drouth
Driving poor wights from hospitable shores
Doubling the loss of time through waste of stores
Sparing nor ships nor cordage wore away
The flower of Argive youth—
And when the prophet cried
Voicing a plan to cure the army s pain

Even than that cruel wind
More cruel to the chieftains in their pride
Recalling Artemis to mind
Whereat the Atridae with their sceptres twain
Striking the ground from tears could not refrain

Twere hard to disobey
These words the elder chieftain spake that day
But were t not hard on the altar step to stand
And stain with virgin streams a father s hand?
O heavy doom! if I my child must slay
Who sheds upon my home its brightest ray!
Which way I turn is fraught with evil still
No course exempt from ill
How should I fail the fleet?
How sin against the bond myself impressed?
This blood will stay the storm
Then for the blood of maiden pure and sweet
The ruin of a faultless form
Sorrow must yield to passionate unrest
Of strong desire May all be for the best!

So when his neck received the fatal yoke
Within his breast arose the counter gale
And impious thoughts from lurking depths upbroke
Unholy and fraught with bale
An altered man he recked no more of crime
For the first shock of grief bore unfelt
Hardens the spirit that erewhile could melt
With maddening counsel He, that dreadful time,
Endured to slay his daughter so to aid
The warfare in a woman s cause arrayed—
So to advance the fleet
With favouring auspice meet!

What cared that council eager for the strife,
That on her lip the name of father hung
That unpolluted was her virgin life
  So pure, so bright so young!
The father bade those priests after the prayer
Above the altar face to earth on high
Like kindling there to lift her ruthlessly
With garments drooping round her and the fair
Sweet mouth to bridle with speech stifling force
Lest some faint cry heard in that ritual s course,
    Might bring disastrous doom
    Upon her father s home

She shed to earth her veil of saffron dye
And smote her sacrificers one by one
With pity kindling arrows from her eye,
Willing to speak as if some artist hand
That dumb fair piece had done
How often in her own dear land
She charmed the feasters in her father s hall
With fresh young voice honouring his festival,
And with her loving presence graced the store
Of scathless plenty on that palace floor!

What followed then I saw not nor will tell
The mystic arts of Calchas won their way
Nor on things future boots it now to dwell
Farewell to that! Clear in the history s close,
'Twill dawn with the new day
Knowledge belongs of right to those
Who read the lesson of the fact they feel
Fore thinking were fore sorrowing May the wheel
Bring round good fortune! such the wishful mind
Of us last guards of Argos left behind

Enter CLYTEMNESTRA

LEADER OF CHO Queen Clytemnestra we are come to render
Our duties to thy royalty For when
The kingly throne is vacant it is meet
The consort of the prince should have all homage
We are here with loyal hearts intent to learn
If some good tidings coming to thine ear
Have prompted thine auspicious sacrifice
Speak if thou wilt If not we rest content

CLY With glad intelligence the proverb saith
Let Morning issue from the womb of Night
A joy beyond your hope tis yours to hear
Our Argive host hath taken Priam s town

CHO How? Tis incredible Speak yet again

CLY Troy is in Grecian hands Are those words plain?

CHO Unlooked for joy brings tears into mine eye

CLY Those tears attest your loyalty of heart

CHO But hast thou proof that may be trusted lady?

CLY Unless some god have been deceiving me

CHO Hast thou then hearkened to some flattering dream?

CLY No slumbrous fancies work on my belief

CHO But some speech-omen lighting on thy soul—

CLY Should that elate me like a girl? Ye mock me!

CHO Say then how long ago the city fell

CLY In the same night that now brings forth the day

CHO What messenger could bear the news so swiftly?

CLY The Fire god flashed it hither from Mount Ida
Fire was the post and beacons were the stages
First Ida sent him to the Hermaean bluff
Of Lemnos, whence the flaming torch that rose

Was caught by Athos Zeus s promontory
Thence high aloft far glancing o er the sea
The blazing pine sped on the traveller flame,
Making strange sunrise on Makistus height
Who ready for that dawn neglected not
A courier s office, but gave signal far
Across Euripus to the watchmen set
On wild Messapius They replied and sent
The glad news onward kindling a dry heap
Of aged heather And the mighty flame
Nought bating of his radiant power o erleapt
Asopus flats and like a brilliant moon
Silvering the forehead of Cithaeron waked
A fresh relay of courier torches there
Nor was the far sped beacon flame denied
But re inforcing it beyond command
That mountain guard upreared a royal blaze,
To shoot beyond Gorgopis bay and strike
The mount of Aegiplanctus where it roused
Loyal renewal of the appointed fire
Heaping on fuel with unsparing hand
They raised a beard like pyramid of flame
Whose light rushed past the foreland that looks forth
Towards Aegina till it reached the height
That crowns our city this Arachnian hill —
Whence lastly on the Atridae s roof lights down
That lineal offspring of the Idaean flame
Such torch race had we ordered and prepared
In bright successive courses ministered
But here one runner first and last i the race,
Hath touched the goal and shouted Victory!
This is the proof and token I proclaim
Sent by my husband from the heart of Troy

CHO O lady our thanksgivings shall be paid
To Heaven hereafter We would hear thee still
Listening and wondering—so thou wouldst speak anew
CLY To-day the Achaeans are possessed of Troy
A jarring din methinks is rising there!
Into one vessel pouring oil and vinegar
You will not see them lovingly combine
Even so the captives and the captors cries
Tell diverse tales of Fortune s twofold power
Those now are fallen about the prostrate forms
Of husbands brothers friends—young children too
Clinging to grey haired fathers—and from throats
No longer free lament their dearest slain
But these being wearied with the night s exploit
O er watched and hungry break their fast i the town
On what is yet to be found there—not by rule—
No order no precedence no degree—
But even as each hath plucked the lot of chance
So now inhabiting the ransacked homes
Of captive Trojans sheltered from the dews
And frosts of the open field as men released
From toil they will sleep all night nor dream of danger
And if they reverence well the gods that hold
The captured city and the temples there
The spoiler may escape being spoiled But let
No lust seduce that host to plunder things
Inviolable as overcome by greed
The race is not yet over Still remains
The home return to round their emulous course
Yea even without offended Deity
Or tricks of chance the spirits of the slain
May awake in wrath and bar the homeward way
Thus—if ye list to hear a woman s word—

Would run my counsel But may good prevail
Without a flaw! The blessings of my home
Are manifold and I would keep them still

[*Exit* CLYTEMNESTRA

LEADER OF CHO All praise to thee Zeus king supreme!
and O night kind protectress to thee!
How rich were thy splendours when over the bulwarks of Troy
Thou didst drop the wide net of destruction that none great or small man or boy
Fled beyond but was taken or perished none crept through the meshes of doom
All praise to the power everlasting that punishes perfidy home!
Long since on the string was the arrow that neither too feebly should fly
Nor idly o er head of the sinner should mount as if aimed at the sky
But should pierce through the bosom of Paris—The hour and the death stroke are come!

CHORUS

From Zeus came down the stroke that lowered their pride
So much may be discerned beyond dispute
They fared as he determined One denied
Gods could be thought to care, when man or brute
Had trampled o er the grace of holiest things
He knew not reverence But the truth is shown
In judgement falling on proud warrior kings
Who when their halls were bursting with excess
Beyond the limit of true happiness
Defied all laws to gods or mortals known

Where is the limit? Let but sorrow cease
And all within be peace
The wise in heart shall be well satisfied
For wealth ne er proved a fortress for the man
Who mad with having insolently ran
At Right s high altar in his impious thought
Minded to hurl it into nought

But strong Delusion Sin s disastrous child
Brooding o er future trespass works her will
Remediless Not to be reconciled
Nor yet concealed the bane is shining still
As in the assaying peers the base alloy
With lurid brilliance ruinously clear
Even so he fares who like a wanton boy
Chases the bird that mocks his eager hand
And on his people brings a cureless brand
Loudly he prays but none in Heaven will hear
God strikes to earth the man of unjust ways
Outcast from hope of praise
So Paris harboured in these halls defiled
With base ingratitude the Atridae s home
He wronged the chieftain of yon stately dome
Stealing with robber guile the beauteous wife,
Unfaithful cause of future strife

She left unto her friends in Argos here
Clashing of shields arming of ships and men
And taking to the city of her new lord
Destruction for a dowry lightly then
She passed the portal sinning without fear
Whilst ominous voices there that flight deplored
Woe for the palace home! Woe for her spouse!
Woe for her wifely ways within the house!

He stands dishonoured silent murmuring not,
Soul stricken before that unremoved blot,
While longing for the lost one over seas
Shall banish all heart s-ease,
That some unbodied ghost shall seem
To rule the house, as in a dream
The loveliest forms of stone
To that deserted one
Are hateful. In the spirit s listless void
All sense of beauty sinks destroyed

Yet visions of the night, born of regret,
Bring to his saddened soul a vain delight
Is it not vain if when one thinks to reap
Strange joy the cherished object fleets from sight
(Even while with gladdening tears the eyes are wet)
On wings that follow with the steps of sleep?
Such home-felt wounds within the palace wall
Are bleeding Ay and would that these were all!—
Nay everywhere through Grecian lands is seen,
In each man s home, much heart-corroding teen.
From Grecian lands together forth they went,
Each by their loved ones sent
And now the soul of friends is sore
To think whom they shall see no more.
Whom they sent forth they know
But to their bitter woe,
No well loved form but urns of crumbling earth
Return to each man s natal hearth

Ares, grim usurer of blood and breath
That swings his balance o er the fields of death,
Sends back from Ilium to their friends
(For warriors loss no just amends)

Their ashes blackened by the funeral fire,—
Poor dust! so heavy not with gold but grief
Affording to the dumb desire
Of tears but scant relief
Then as with tender heed they store away
Each precious burden in its vase of clay
They groan while praising one for skill in fight
And one for his brave conduct in the strife
Fallen to avenge another warrior s wife
This last is murmured low
While silent wrath doth grow
Gainst Atreus sons great champions of their right.
Others with limbs unravaged in the shade
By Ilion s bulwarks made
Rest undisturbed —the hostile land they hold
Hides them beneath her kindly mould
Ah! dangerous are the murmurs of the town!
A nation s curse lives in the people s frown
One thought of mine night yet doth shroud
It would be spoken but not loud
Great bloodshed draws the gaze of Deity
The dark Erinys in long lapse of time
Grinds down to helpless poverty
Him who in ways of crime
Hath flourished but in dim reverse of doom
Shall stain the lustre of that odious bloom
And once among the lost he hath no more force.
Danger is theirs too that are praised by all
From jealous eyes the fire of Heaven doth fall.
Mine be the moderate lot
That envy blasteth not!
I would not run the royal conqueror s course,

Nor yet would I be conquered and behold
The life I shared of old
Subdued to strangers and my country s folk
Writhing beneath an alien yoke

Good news delivered by the beacon flash
Shot through the city a rumour swift and rash
Yet who can tell if things be as they seem
Or God have sent us a deceitful gleam?
'Twere childish or insensate to allow
One s heart to kindle at that cheering glow
And quench it when a word
Of differing note is heard

None but a woman framed of hopes and fears,
Should yield assent before the fact appears
Persuasion soon invades the female s realm
Her judgment s pale is quickly overthrown
Feebly she holds an unresisting helm
But fading soon to nothing the renown
Told by a woman s tongue
Will not endure for long

Enter the HERALD

LEADER OF CHO Ha!
Now we shall know for certain how to deem
Of those bright signals of transmitted fire
Whether truth is in them or this light of joy
Dreamlike cajoled our minds with empty hope
I see a herald coming from the shore
With olive boughs o ershadowed and the dust
(Clay s thirsty neighbouring sister) tells me plain
This is no voiceless phantom messenger

Of smoke and blaze from mountain bonfire sprung
But will speak audibly—whether of joy
Or—but I waive the less auspicious word
May that fair token now be crowned with good!—
Whoso prays otherwise for this our state
Heaven visits his soul s trespass on himself

HER O Fatherland of Argos dearly loved
In this tenth year I tread thy hallowed ground
Though many a hope hath snapped this anchor holds
Beyond expectance I had long despaired
E en of kind burial in my native earth
Hail Argive country Argive light and thou
Zeus over all!—thou too great Pythian King
Let thy keen darts no longer fly our way
Enough they vexed us before Troy But now
Apollo heal and save us! Yea all ye
Gods of our thoroughfares—thou above all
Hermes dear herald whom we heralds worship—
And ye great warriors of old time whose spirits
Followed us forth—receive again from war
With kindly thoughts this remnant of the host
O well loved palace of our kings and ye
Dread thrones of judgement and great Powers that face
The morning with your brightest glances greet
Our Sovereign in his triumph of to-day
He comes long waited for bringing to you
And all this people glory out of gloom
Light for long darkness Then salute him well
Who well deserves it having ransacked Troy
And dug the ground there with the spade of Doom
That by the righteous will of Zeus most high
Temples and altars are no more no more
A germ of life in all the desolate land.

Such yoke is cast upon proud Ilion s neck
By the elder son of Atreus who this day
Returns a happy warrior of all men
Most to be honoured having wreaked in full
The rape of Helen on all the Trojan name
Not Paris or all his people leagued in one
May boast their suffering lighter than their deed
Proclaimed a thief and robber he hath lost
More than his booty having razed to the earth
His father s house and ravaged his own land
Priam s sons have paid the penalty twice o er

CHO Hail! herald of the host I bid thee joy

HER Yea from this moment I could welcome death

CHO Didst thou so yearn for this thy fatherland?

HER So that warm tears stand in mine eyes for gladness

CHO Then in that trouble ye were not unblest

HER Let me be master of that speech Explain

CHO Being touched with love of those who longed for you

HER Mean you the land yearned likewise for her sons?

CHO Ay! these dim souls have often sighed for you

HER. Whence came this cloud upon your spirits? Tell!

CHO Silence hath long been our best remedy

HER How? Feared ye any man your lord away?

CHO In thine own words—we could have welcomed death

HER I spake that in my joy Yet looking backward
Doubtless our hap was chequered with some woe.
Who save the gods eternally command
Pleasure unmingled? Were I now to tell
Our toils and hardships neath the open sky
Lying on narrow bunks ill lined and bare,

Lamenting each day s lack of every store
Then on firm land still worse to lodge ı the field
Close under the enemy s wall with rain from heaven
Or dews from the damp meadow drizzling over
Our clothes our bodies and our clotted hair —
Or should one tell o the storm wind striking down
The falcon from her pride with icy power
Swooping from Ida s snows or of the heat
When idle Ocean in his bed at noon
Lay motionless and not an air might breathe—
But no! Why grieve o er troubles that are past?—
So past for some as never any more
They will care to rise from where they lie But we,
The living why should we to day count over
The lost or mourn malignant Fortune s power?
Farewell say I to sorrow! We survive
Our gain o erweighs past trouble and to-day
On land or coursing over seas we call
This morning s sun to look upon the host
Returning with triumphant spoils from Troy
By us at length subdued —to hang them up
In all the temples of Hellenic gods
A bright and everlasting monument
Hear this, ye people and extol your State
And our great leaders, duly rendering praise
To Zeus first author of these gifts I have said

Enter CLYTEMNESTRA

CHO Your happy tidings have prevailed to cheer me.
The old are ever young enough to learn
When good approaches And thy words bring good,
To our queen and palace first and then to me
CLY Long since I raised the shout of joy when came

The first night messenger of fire to tell
That Troy was taken Ilion overthrown
Men chid me saying Dost thou now believe
Persuaded by a bonfire Troy is fallen?
How like a woman to be thus elate!
Yet brought I mine oblation and glad cries
In female notes were sounded here and there
About the city—as with incense poured
They soothed at every shrine the odorous flame
Now why ask more of thee? I shall hear all
From mine own husband when he comes I will haste
Nobly to meet my lord s return What light
Is sweeter to a woman s eyes than that
Which floods the opening gate when Heaven brings home
Her husband from the war? Bear back this word
Let him come quickly loved of all the land
And may he find the wife he left behind
Unchanged still faithful watching o er his home,
Like a good house-dog fierce to his enemies
But kind to him and holding unprofaned
So long the pressure of his last embrace
Of joys with other men or guilty word
I know no more than of the blacksmith s art
Such boast instinct with honest truthfulness,
A noble wife may utter without blame.

[*Exit*

CHO Herald thine ear a sound interpreter
Hath taught thee the fair meanings of the queen
But tell us now we pray thee of the prince
This land delights to honour Menelaus—
Comes he with you in safety to his home?
HER. Were I to utter false glad tidings here,

Short lived were that delight for those I love

CHO Ah then! let what is good be likewise true!
Goodness and truth dissevered are soon known

HER I tell the simple truth The man is lost
Gone from the fleet His ship is no more seen

CHO Say launched he forth from Troy in sight of men,
Or did a storm that troubled all your host
Snatch him away?

HER You hit the centre there,
Condensing in brief words a world of woe

CHO How? What report from other mariners
Was noised about him as alive or dead?

HER One only can with surety answer you
The Sun who nourishes Earth s various brood

CHO How mean you that the storm assailed the fleet
And proved the executor of wrath from Heaven?

HER A day of blessing ought not to be stained
With news of bale Heaven s honour should be clear
An evil messenger with darkened brow
That brought you tidings of an army s fall
A twofold horror doubly charged with woe
First for the country s wound then for the homes
Whose men had been devoted to the scourge
Loved of the War god armed with death and dole—
The tongue so laden with calamities
Might chant this hymn of heavenly wrath

But I
Who come with news of peace and bright success
To a city smiling with prosperity
Why must I dash my good with ill by telling
Of the dire storm Heaven sent to plague our fleet?
Fire and the sea those ancient foes were leagued
In firm alliance visibly fulfilled

To wreck our ill starred navy Twas i the night
Came the onset of the billowy adversary
Big with disaster for the Thracian blast
Smote ship gainst ship that gored and butted each
Her neighbour buffeted with swilling brine
And raging tempest till they passed from sight
Like kine a madman drives On that wild scene
The sun arising cloudless showed us all
The Aegean strewn with wreaths of floating wreck
And bodies of Achaean men Our vessel
Some power divine or pleading with the storm
Or thwarting him made scathless Twas no mariner
But saving Providence stood by our helm
And steered us neither to a boisterous road stead
Nor on the breakers of a rock lanced shore
Then rescued from that watery death amidst
Fair daylight not believing our escape
Our thoughts were mindful of a new distress
Mourning the wreck and havoc of our fleet
May Heaven still work us good! So much is clear
If any of those we parted from still breathe,
They reason of our death as we of theirs
And as for Menelaus let us hope
He above all may be preserved and come
Back to his home Zeus wills not yet we trust
His race should perish—and will find some means
To keep him still in life Somewhere the sun
Beholds him and his eyes enjoy the day
Now Argives I have told you all the truth

CHORUS

Who gave the ill-omened name,
So fraught with terror for the time to be

Short lived were that delight for those I love

CHO Ah then! let what is good be likewise true!
Goodness and truth dissevered are soon known

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To a city smiling with prosperity
Why must I dash my good with ill by telling
Of the dire storm Heaven sent to plague our fleet?
Fire and the sea those ancient foes were leagued
In firm alliance visibly fulfilled

The light of Righteousness in smoky homes
  Shines unimpaired honouring the humble lot
From gilded halls impure as Earth she roams,
  She turns her gaze to bless the pious cot
The power of riches falsely stampt with praise
Wins not her worship by its spurious blaze
Her judgement ever points to the far goal
Whereto she leads all lives with sure control
Shaping the hour to suit with distant days

Enter AGEMEMNON *in a chariot with* CASSANDRA *beside him*

LEADER OF CHO King of Argos and scion of Atreus destroyer of Ilios town
With what words shall I greet thee aright how award thee they meed of renown
Neither shortening thy merits unduly nor aimlessly rushing beyond?
Our race oft transgresseth in judgement Too many weak mortals are fond
Of the *seeming of right not regarding how Justice offended* may frown
Men are ready with sighs for the fall of a friend while the heart is unwrung
And with smiles for success where the face is compelled to accord with the tongue
But the shepherd who tells o er his flock with due heed cannot fail to discern
The eyes that in waterish kindness pretend with affection to burn

Then know for I will not dissemble, when once thou didst marshal the host

Thou hadst levied to fight for fair Helen providing at in finite cost
Forced courage in soldierly bosoms of thousands prepared to be slain
Unlovely to me looked thine image unskilful thy hand to maintain
Thy spirit s true course as thy bark on that weltering ocean was tossed
But now from my soul s depth arises a voice of warm wel come for those
Whose labour of doubtful beginning is fortunate here at the close
And in time thou shalt clearly discover of all thou didst leave in command
Who have failed or been faithful in keeping their charge and protecting the land

AGAM Argos dear country and my country s gods!
Ye claim my foremost word Without your aid
I had ne er returned nor wrought on Priam s town
This righteous retribution Yea the gods
Moved by the unspoken pleadings one and all
Gave sentence for the slaughterous sack of Troy
The blood stained Vase had all the votes I the other
Hope lingered while no plenishing hand came near —
Her smoke still shows the desolate city s fall
'Tis Ruin s altar whence the dying ashes
Of wealth consumed spout forth voluminous breath
For this we are bound to recompense the gods
With mindful thank-offerings Our vengeful snare
Held firm that none escaped but glorious Ilium
Was, for a woman s sake ground into dust
By the apparition of the monstrous birth

That, whilst Orion sank one autumn night,
Leapt from the Horse in Argive panoply
A ravening lion o er the walls he sprang
And lapped rich largess of the blood of princes
  So far forth I address the gods Meanwhile
I bear in mind your moderate words and like
The spirit they convey Your thoughts are mine.
Few men are born so tempered as to look
Without some envy on a prosperous friend
The venom of unkindness lodged within
Clings to the heart and doubles all annoy
While men not only mind their own distress,
But groan at other men s prosperity
How well I know and *ıld describe the friend*
In name, the mirror of companionship—
Indeed a mirror a mere fleeting shade
Odysseus only who sailed against his will
Once yoked with me was ever staunch and true
  I say it of one of whom to-day I know not
If he be dead or yet alive
                                        For the rest
Touching the city and the gods we will call
Our larger council and deliberate there
In full assembly studying to preserve
Whatever in the present state is well
And where some cure is needed we will try
With remedies gently administered
Though sometimes sharp and painful to prevent
All dangerous malady—Now to my hall
Where my first greeting shall again be made
To the kind gods who sent me safely forth
And bring me home in peace. May Victory
Since hither she attends us here remain!

Re-enter CLYTEMNESTRA

CLY Ye men of Argos elders of our state,
I will not shame to tell before your face
My wifely love The fear of man wears off
With time My heart instructs me to declare
How while your sovereign tarried before Troy
My life was doleful Tis no light distress
To sit at home forlorn the man away
Malignant rumours ever in one s ears
One crying he came another he had brought
Dishonour worse even than his death Moreover,
Had he as many wounds as loose tongued Fame
Gave forth a net had fewer holes than he
And had he died as often as twas said
A second Geryon with three bodies he
Had donned a threefold mantle of earth —I pass
The abyss of ground beneath him —in each form
Dying once at least Vexed by such wild reports
I had often tied the noose above my head
Which others took perforce from off my neck
Hence, too Orestes is not here our son
The pledge of both our loves Nay marvel not!
Our kind ally and friend Strophius in Phocis
Keeps him in ward 'Twas he admonished me
Of a twofold danger thine beneath Troy wall
And of this Argive realm lest popular fury
Upset the Council —as mankind are apt
When one is down to trample him the more.
None can suspect a shallow pretext there
As for my tears, they spouted till the fount
Ran dry and kept no drop But on my bed
Mine eyes were worn with watching early and late,

Grieving because the fires of thy return
Were still unkindled And amidst my dreams
The gnat s small peremptory tones would wake me
While seeing more dangers than the time could hold
Assailing thee But now those weary days
Are over and I shout exempt from care
Here stands the watch-dog of the fold the mainstay
That saves the vessel yea the lofty pillar
That holds the roof from ground —an only son
Returning to his father or to mariners
Firm land appearing beyond hope fair day
Seen after tempest to the thirsty traveller
A spring of running water mid the sand
To escape from wretchedness is always joy
Such terms of greeting have I for my lord
Let envy rest aloof since in the past
We have borne much misery But now dear king
Light from that car not setting foot on earth
Thou that hast trodden down the strength of Troy!
Maidens why tarry ye that have command
To pave the floor of his path with cloth of grain?
Let there be made forthwith a purple road
That to complete the Day s surprise great Justice
May lead him to his home
For what remains
Considerate thought not giving way to slumber
Shall order well whate er the gods decree
[*The female attendants prepare to lay the carpet*
AGAM Daughter of Leda guardian of my Hall
Thy welcome like mine absence hath been long
Yet praise that rightly squares with my desert
Must come to me from others Furthermore,
Do not, I pray thee, like some eastern slave,

Meet me with loud and prostrate courtesies
Nor with this woman pleasing luxury
Of purple trappings pluck down on my path
An eye of envy To the gods alone
Such tribute should be paid For mortal man
To trample on rich webs of varied hue
To me is a thing by no means void of fear
I seek for human honours not divine
Fame needs no carpets nor embroidered wefts
Beneath her feet to sound her note of praise
And modesty is Heaven s best gift When one
Shall end a happy life in peace and joy
Then celebrate his glory! By this rule
We still may live and prosper safe from harm

Cly Come tell me this and hide not your true thought

Agam With mind unaltered I will answer thee

Cly You might have vowed this in some hour of peril?

Agam I know it None better Prompt is that reply

Cly And what of Priam were he conqueror now?

Agam He had paved his path with broideries I believe

Cly Be not too sensitive to vulgar blame

Agam The people s muttered verdict hath great power

Cly Who is not envied ne er will be admired

Agam Contentiousness in woman is not well

Cly Nay but tis gracious when a victor yields

Agam Is this a battle in which you care to win?

Cly Come let me triumph on the taker of Troy!

Agam If you must have it so let some one loose
The shoe that like a slave supports my tread
Lest trampling o er these royal dyes some god
Smite me with envious glances from afar
It awes me not a little thus to plunge

In luxury walking on webs of price.
[*His slippers are removed*
So that is settled But receive I pray thee
This stranger woman kindly Heaven still smiles
When power is used with gentleness No mortal
Is willingly a captive but this maid
Of countless spoils the flower and crown was given
To me by the army and attends me home
[*He descends while* CASSANDRA *remains upon the car*
Now since you have subdued me, I obey
Thus pacing over purple to my hall
CLY Of purple neath the inexhaustible sea
Enough remains to garnish many a realm
With precious dye for raiment oft renewed
We too my monarch by the help of Heaven,
Possess our share No poverty is here!
I had vowed to trample many a gorgeous robe,
Had oracles enjoined it on our house
In hope of bringing home this glorious head
Our root was still i the ground But now returns
The foliage that gives shadow from the heat
Thy coming is our warmth in winter time
But at the season when Zeus turns the grape
From sour green sap to wine tis shady and cool
I the palace while its lord is walking there
[*He goes in*
Zeus—thou fulfillest all—fulfill my prayer!
And take good heed of all thou doest herein!
[*Exit* CLYTEMNESTRA

CHORUS

What means this haunting Fear
Incessant hovering near

To scare my prescient heart with vague unrest?
This hymn unhired unbidden of bodings drear?
Why may not Hope renewed
With bold belief of good
Regain her wonted seat in my dear breast?
Away dim dreams! Cease from your vain annoy!
The time is past when on the sandy coast
Together moored the ships their beauty lost
Ageing or ere the host
Might reach their haven neath the walls of Troy

Not by report I learn
Our hero s home return
Myself the eye witness I beheld him come
Yet ne ertheless my spirit doth inly burn
And holding firm no more
Hope s confidence of yore
Sings without lyre that self taught strain of doom
Not idly stir these inward monishings
Within the throbbing heart that beats on thought
Of judgement with prophetic dreams distraught
Yet may they come to nought
And let my fears be unac omplished things!

Great health is prone to end in boundless woe
Disease weighs hard on the thin partner wall
And when that neighbour hath looked in we know
The man s full fortune but prepares his fall
His ship in her fair course with sudden shock
Strikes on the viewless rock
Even then if caution from a timely sling
Some portion of his wealth to the ocean fling
His vessel lightened of her fateful load
Shall save her timbers from the raging flood

Her fabric shall not founder in the deep
Heaven s ample gifts with the revolving years
Shall banish hunger with its brood of fears
Full harvest from rich furrows they shall reap

But once let blood of man drop to the ground
Before his time and darken all the sod
What spell to call it upward shall be found?
What leech so wise? Though he were all but God
Who learned the secret of restoring breath
To mortals sunk in death
Zeus put an end to that for evermore
The bound is set and none may pass it o er
Else ere the tongue could move, the heart should speak
Of the sore burden that now bids her break
As darkly muttering her dim desire
O er fraught with pain she may not hope to unwind
The ravelled ponderings of her secret mind
That inly burns as with consuming fire

Re-enter CLYTEMNESTRA

CLY In with thee too Cassandra! Get thee in!
Since Heaven in mercy hath consigned thee here
To share our household s lustral waters one
Of many slaves that stand around our hearth
Come from that carriage Be not proud Descend!
Have we not heard Alcmena s offspring once
Was sold a slave and felt the galling yoke?
But when misfortune brings one to this pass
'Tis no small boon to serve an ancient house
Since they who have harvested beyond their hope
Make cruel masters and exceed the bound
Thou hast such greeting as I use to a slave.

CHO She hath said and thou hast heard Her words are clear
And now thou art in the fatal toils perchance
Thou mayst obey her But methinks thou art loth

CLY Well if she be not like the immigrant bird
Possessor of a strange outlandish tongue
My words must find their way and move her will

CHO (*to* CASS) Go with her! What she sayeth is for the best
As things are now Come down and leave that car!

CLY I have not time to waste out here with her
By this the victims at our midmost hearth
Stand ready for the slaughter and the fire —
Rich thank-offerings for mercies long despaired
Then if thou wilt obey me do it with speed
But if thou wilt not understand nor speak
Declare it with the gesture of thy race!

CHO 'Twould seem she needs a clear interpreter
Her ways are as of a creature newly caught

CLY Sure she is mad and follows crazy thoughts
Who leaving her own city newly ta en
Comes hither and hath not the sense to pace
In harness till she foam away in blood
Her spirit upon the bit
I ll not demean myself
By throwing more words away [*Exit* CLYTEMNESTRA

CHO But I unhappy one,
Will not be angry for I feel for thee
Come leave that car deserted yield to Fate
And prove the unaccustomed yoke Descend

CASS (*from the car*) Ai ai! O Apollo! Apollo!

CHO Wherefore *that* cry to Phoebus? Not for him

The voice of mourning
CASS Ai! Apollo! Apollo!
Ai! Ai! O Apollo!
CHO Again she summons with that sound of woe
The god whose ears detest it
CASS O my Apollo
Builder! Destroyer!
Builder of Troy! Destroyer of me!
Once more thy heavy hand with ease hath ruined me.
CHO Hark! She will prophesy of her despair
A captive yet she holds the heavenly fire!
CASS Apollo! Apollo!
Troy builder! Destroyer of me!
Ha! What is here? What roof? Whither hast thou brought me?
CHO The Atridae s palace If thou know st it not,
I tell thee plainly and thou wilt find it true
CASS Ah!
Nay but a hideous den abhorred of Heaven
Guilt stained with strangled lives with kinsmen s blood
A place of sprinkled gore of clotted horror!
Ah! Faugh!
CHO Her scent is keen this stranger s! Like a hound
She snuffs for blood And she will find I doubt me
CASS Yea! There there! there! Here s evidence enough!
Smell? Nay—I see I hear them! Little children
Whose throats are cut still wailing of their murder
And the roast flesh a father tasted—swallowed!
CHO We have heard of thy renown in prophecy
But yet forbear There needs no prophet here
CASS Ah! what is this? Oh me!
What strange new grief is risen?

A deed of might! She plans it there even now
Beneath yon roof a plague
Hard to remove not to be borne an act
Of hate for love and succour bides aloof
Far far away!

CHO This prophecy is dark to me The last
Was clear Our city rings with that old woe

CASS Wretch! Wilt thou do it? Ah me!
The lord of thine embrace
When thou hast bathed him that his bright limbs glow—
How shall I tell it? Twill come!
Tis here! She lifts her hand she launches at him
Blow following blow

CHO I understand not yet The oracular word
Blinds with its riddling purport I am perplexed

CASS What apparition? Oh the pain! What is it?
Some net of Death and Hell?
Nay tis the snare o the chamber th accessory
O the murder Let yon pack that ravins on the race
Howl Out upon the butchery! Stone her! Stone her!

CHO What cry of ban-dogs bid st thou curse the house?
Thy speech appals me To my heart runs back
The death-drop that when life is ebbing fast
From mortal wounds and his last beam is pale
Falls with his setting Oh! how swift is sorrow!

CASS What do I see? Ah keep away the cow
From the lordly bull! Look look!
She hath caught him in the garment smites and gores him
With that black weapon of hers He falls he falls
I the watery tun the guileful fatal cauldron!

CHO I would boast of little skill in prophecies
But I may guess, this raving bodes no good

Yet when was soothsaying bright?
What sound of cheer have prophets for the world?
Ills are their stock in trade words are their tools
With chanted strains of woe
They strike vain terror into mortal mind
CASS Woe! for my hapless doom!
To fill the cup I tell my own sad tale!
Why hast thou brought me to this place? Oh misery!
To die with thee? What else? To die! to die!
CHO Thou art distraught or else possessed Some god
Bears thee away to sing of thine own doom
A wild untutored song like her
The brown sweet nightingale—once a princess yonder
Insatiable of wailing her sad heart
Still set on sorrow mourning evermore
For Itys Itys! Tis her life She blooms
With misery
CASS Oh! for a lot like hers!
The clear voiced maid to whom kind gods have given
A feathery form and wings! Safe calm sweet life!
Mine to be cleft in twain with two-edged brand
CHO Whence this returning trouble of thy soul
This god fraught vain distress the ill-omened cry
That peals in terrifying song?
Whence comes thy music whence thy thrilling lay?
What limits hath thy Heaven inspired way?
Who set them? Who hath given the evil word
Wherewith thy breast is stirred?
CASS Paris thy wedding hath destroyed thy house,
Yea and thy sister!—O Scamander stream!
Our fathers drank of thee and by thy shore
I grew I flourished oh unhappy I!
But now by dark Cocytus and the banks

Clearly discernible—the heart the liver
Of which their father ate!
For this I say
Vengeance is plotted by a craven lion
That tumbled in the lordly monarch s lair
In his absence—so kept house for *him*—alas!
My master On e a captive one must bear it!
He ruled the fleet and razed the towers of Ilium
But knows not what the monster woman dares
What sequel to her garrulous speech and face
Of welcome brightening as the moon—like Ate
Lurking in night—she ll work with wicked speed
The man slaying woman! To what horrid form
Shall I compare her and be true? To Scylla
That raging mother of death dwelling in rocks
Now rending the poor mariner but once
A pitiless curse to her own?—or Amphisbaena?

Heard ye her triumph? Even as warriors shout
Who turn the battle, so the woman cried
Seeming to joy in his return from war

Ye are still incredulous It makes no difference
What is to come will come—and soon Thou seeing
Shalt pity and say Her soothsaying was too true!

CHO Thyestes banquet of his children s flesh
I understood and shuddered Fear possessed me
To hear it truly given each point observed
But as I listened further I was lost

CASS Agamemnon s death I tell thee thou shalt see

CHO Unhappy one! Speak no ill-omened word!

CASS *This* time I summon not the god of healing!

CHO Death has no healer But be it far I pray!

CASS Ye pray while others slay or are about it
CHO What man can be the author of this woe?
CASS What *man?* Far wide indeed that arrow flew!
CHO Yea for I cannot guess who is to do it
CASS And yet I have learnt too well the speech of Hellas
CHO So hath the Pythoness Yet her words are dark
CASS Oh pain! What burning fire! It comes it comes!
Lykian Apollo! Woe! me miserable!

This human lioness couching with a wolf
While the noble lion was away will kill
Me the unfortunate, a fair prize to make
One more ingredient in her chalice of bane
Sharpening her husband s death knife she declares
My death too shall requite his bringing me
—Why wear I still these mockeries of my soul
This wand these fillets round my neck? I tear ye
Thus! Go to your destruction ere I die!
To pieces with you! Lead the way! I follow!
Enrich some other life with misery!
See! see! Apollo! he is stripping from me
This prophet mantle
Ay thou didst visit me
Thine eye beheld me, even in these hallowed weeds,
Insulted spurned with those who loved me well.
By our enemies who swept in like a flood
They called me beggar priestess roving seer
I bore it—dying with hunger poor dismayed!
And now the Seer of seers, Prophet supreme,
Disrobing here his prophetess conducts me
To this dark ending For my father s altar
What waits me now? The block the bloody knife,
The hot last blow that ends the sacrifice.

Yet shall we die not unobserved of Heaven
He liv s who shall avenge us Come he shall
The mother slaying scion of his race
Redeemer of his sire s renown From far
The wanderer shall return and put the cope
On these home troubles For the gods in Heaven
Have sworn a mighty oath his father s fall
Shall draw him from his alien dwelling place
Why do I linger thus and mourn since first
I saw my city s ruin and again
Her captor judged of the gods receives this doom?
I will go forward! I will dare to die!
Hail then thou gate of Hell!

But first one prayer!

Oh grant me all ye gods! a mortal wound!
That with no struggling while the deathful stream
Flows painlessly away these eyes may close!

CHO Deep-thoughted deeply suffering maid thy words
Have far extended If thou know st thy doom
For certain how canst thou like god-driven victim
Walk boldly toward the altar of thy death?

CASS It may not be avoided Tis the hour!

CHO But every moment s respite has some worth

CASS The time is come Small gain were flight to me.

CHO A bold heart hast thou for thy bitter woe

CASS None but the wretched hear such benison

CHO Yet mortal life is graced by a noble death

CASS Woe for thee father and thy noble sons!

[*She is approaching the palace gate—then turns away*

CHO What terror turns thee backward from the gate?

CASS Ah woe!

CHO What s thine abhorrence? or why criest thou thus?

CASS These halls exhale with murder! drip with death!
CHO 'Tis but the reek of household sacrifice
CASS 'Tis like a charnel room It steams with gore
CHO *Other than Syrian perfume find st thou then?*
CASS Nay I will go within and there bewail
Agamemnon s fate and mine I have done with life!
Oh strangers! friends!
I shrink not idly like some timorous bird
Before a bush! Bear record in that day
When I am dead and for this woman slain
A woman s life is taken and for the man
Whose wife was naught a man shall meet his doom
Ye hear my last request before I die
CHO Poor maid! We pity thy prophetic fall
CASS *Once more I would speak not now with tears, but firmly*
Touching myself To thee O Sun I pray
Looking my last on thee that when the Hour
Is here and vengeance tarries not I too
A captive prey—soon quelled—ma, be avenged [*Exit*
CHO Ah! What is mortal life? When prosperous
A shadow can o erturn it and when fallen
A throw o the wet sponge blurs the picture out
This is more piteous than the ruin of pride

Who hath e er been content with his triumph or spoken to Fortune this word
—While men point with the finger of envy at halls he hath reared for his pride—
'Tis enough! Come not hither again!
To this king the immortals have given to vanquish the glory of Troy

Yet shall we die not unobserved of Heaven
He lives who shall avenge us Come he shall
The mother slaying scion of his race
Redeemer of his sire s renown From far
The wanderer shall return and put the cope
On these home troubles For the gods in Heaven
Have sworn a mighty oath his father s fall
Shall draw him from his alien dwelling place
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CHO Yet mortal life is graced by a noble death

CASS Woe for thee father and thy noble sons!

[*She is approaching the palace gate—then turns away*

CHO What terror turns thee backward from the gate?

CASS Ah woe!

CHO What s thine abhorrence? or why criest thou thus?

CHO 12 Let s talk no more of this until we know
Barren conjecture is a treacherous guide

LEADER OF CHO The sum of all your counsels then is this
That we make certain how it goes with the king

[*They are approaching the gate when* CLYTEMNESTRA *is discovered with the dead body of* AGAMEMNON *enveloped in the embroidered web*

CLY I, who spake much before to serve my need
Will here unspeak it —unappalled by shame
How else prepare the hostile net to slay
One s foe supposed one s friend and fence it high
Beyond o erleaping?—Time and thought still brooding
On that old quarrel brought me to this blow
'Tis done and here I stand here where I smote him!—
I so contrived it —that I ll ne er deny —
As neither loophole nor defence was left him
I had set round like a stake net for fish
A labyrinth of hangings with no outlet
A limb-embarrassing wealth of woven folds
I smote him twice and with the second groan
He sank and when he had fallen I gave a third
Last stroke to crown the sacrifice and grace
Pluto preserver of the dead Even then
His soul on wing for Hades his keen breath
Smote me with drops of slaughter whose dark dew
Refreshed my spirit even as the bladed corn
That swells to the ear delighteth in Heaven s rain.
Such—oh ye Argive elders who stand here —
Such is the fact Whereat an if ye will
Rejoice ye! Howsoe er it is my boast.
Yea were libation meet o er human victim

Here twere most righteous Such a cup of death
He filled with household crime and now returning
Has drained in retribution
Cho Wondrous bold
Of tongue art thou to boast thus o er thy lord!
Cly Presume ye, as though my thoughts were womanish?
I dare your wisdoms Ye know all and—blame me
Or praise— tis one to me This corpse I tell you
Is Agamemnon once my lord —his death
The work of this right hand proud to have wrought
A masterpiece so righteous Ay tis true
Cho Woman what evil food
From either element of earth or sea
Solid or liquid mingling with thy blood
Hath prompted thee
To kill such sacrifice and then
Fling back from thee the muttered curse of men?
Hast thou cut him off? Thou shalt be cut off from the state
Our citizens shall hate thee with firm hate
Cly That is your sentence I must fly the land
With public execration on my head
Wise justicers! what said ye then to him
Who slew his child nor recked of her dear blood
More than if sacrificing some ewe lamb
From countless flocks that choked the teeming fold
But slew the priceless travail of my womb
For a charm to allay the wind from Thrace? How say you?
Should he not have been banished by your voice
To purge the state? Yet, hearing of my deed,

Ye are swift and harsh in judgement

Threaten then,

Even as ye list but so as being assured
That force must win the day If so ye win
I yield But if Zeus give my plans success —
And they are deeply laid —you shall be taught
Old as ye are to learn the path of peace

CHO Haughty thy spirit and proud
Thy vaunting But as thine infatuate soul
Inflamed with murder in defiance loud
Contemns control
While lurid light is in thine eye
Intoxicate with impious butchery —
Unavenged with no lover at hand in thy Destiny s day
With blow for blow the forfeit thou shalt pay

CLY Say you? Then hear mine oath By mighty Justice,
Final avenger of my murdered child
By Ate and Erinys gods of power
To whom I sacrificed this man I look not
For danger as an inmate whiles our hearth
Is lightened by Aegisthus evermore
As hitherto constant in love to me
My shield my courage! He is fallen who shamed me
In dalliance with Chryseïs and the rest
Before the Trojan wall Ay and that other
His prophet mistress his oracular love
His captive-conqueress that shared his bed
On shore his bench i the ship —she too now lies
In death They have full recompense You see
His fortune—as for her she tuned her lay
Most swanlike for her end wailing their doom
So died the damsel this man brought to lend

New savour to the softness of my bed
CHO O for some speedy stroke
Not of sharp agony nor lingering pain
To bring on us the unawakening sleep!
Since he our gentlest guardian is subdued
And through a woman s guilt —A woman slew him!
Infatuate Helen who alone didst send
So many souls to Hades before Troy!
A life worth all the rest thy sister s deed
Hath quenched in darkness From one little seed
Is grown a strong and ever spreading tree
Of man-destroying strife and misery

CLY Pray not for your death overburdened with what hath been done
Neither turn your displeasure on Helen of Hellas the bane
Who sped many souls to destruction and caused unendurable pain!

CHO O demon of the home
That with alternate violence doth fall
On either branch of Pelops ancient line
Thou to my bitter sorrow wieldest here
Man braving boldness in a woman s mind
Like hateful raven o er her husband s corse
She stands and croaks at us, in
Her proudly inharmonious

CLY At length there is
rightly the
Whose seed in
'Tis of him
nursed

Ere the grief from old wounds hath abated fresh fountains of bloodshed are burst

CHO Mighty and fell of wrath
Declar st thou then the Genius of the race
Recalling a disastrous history
Of dire offences irremediable
And endless Zeus the cause —for what in man
Eludes the author of the Eternal Plan?
Oh king my king how shall I weep for thee?
What words of affection shall flow from my heart?
Thou art there in that web of the spider dishonoured in death
Oh horror! oh murderous guile!
Dishonoured and cleft with the sword
The warm life yet running from thee!

CLY Ye proclaim it my deed Yet beware!
Say not I was wife to the king
'Tis the spirit of Vengeance awaking from sleep
For the banquet by Atreus of old to Thyestes cruelly given,
Putting on the resemblance of her that was queen to the dead
That hath visited all upon him
And hath sternly repaid a grown victim for little ones slain.

CHO That *this is not thy work*
Who will bear witness? The offence is thine,
Whatever spirit of hoarded recompense
From elder ages may have wrought with thee.
Not yet accomplished is the course of strife,
The clotted guilt of infant gore yet cries
For kindred streams of bloody sacrifice,
All from one source, life rendered still for life.
Oh king my king how shall I weep for thee?

What words of affection shall flow from my heart?
Thou art there in that web of the spider dishonoured in death
Oh horror! oh murderous guile!
Dishonoured and cleft with the sword
The warm life yet running from thee!

CLY Prate not of dishonour! Deserving were rather the word
Had *he* not prepared for his house an encumbrance of woe?
Let him not loudly plead there below
That in paying the price of her death whom a nation deplored
The branch I had reared from his loins he is slain with iniquitous sword
Men shall reap what they sow!

CHO I am baffled and amazed and know not whither
To turn me now the house begins to totter
Lashed with red rain that saps it to the fall
I fear it! This is no mere drizzling shower
Fate now is whetting Justice heavy sword
On a new whetstone for fresh deeds of harm

O Earth Earth! would thou hadst covered me
Ere I saw in his low lying bed
'Twixt the sides of yon bath tub of silver the king whom I love!

Who shall bury his corpse who lament him?
Wilt *thou* have the heart
Having slain thine own husband to peal forth his dirge
And atone with light breath for the heavy offence thou hast done?
Ah who shall be found to repeat for the man now divine

The due praise o er his grave pouring tears with each word sorely wrung
By deep thought from the truth of his soul?

CLY Have no care 'Tis not yours to provide I will bury the man whom I slew
No train from the palace shall wail round his bier But his daughter to yield him his due
Running forward to welcome her sire at the quickly passed ford of the dead —
His Iphianassa—shall open her arms and shall cling
With a kiss to the king!

CHO Reproaches cross The battle is hard to judge
Robber is robbed slayer slain Revenge is sure
Firm stands while Zeus remains upon his throne
One law Who doeth shall suffer Who may cast
The brood of curses from yon roof? The race
Is joined and welded to calamity

CLY Therein thou hast prophesied aright But I
Here make my compact with the hellish Power
That haunts the house of Atreus What has been
Though hard we will endure But let him leave
This roof and plague some other race henceforth
With kindred harrowing strife Small share of wealth
Shall amply serve now I have made an end
Of mutual murdering madness in this hall

Enter AEGISTHUS

AEG Sweet day of recompense I hail thy light!
Now lords of yon wide heaven I recognize
Your jurisdiction o er the griefs of men
When I behold this man to my great joy
Laid in yon shroud of the Erinyes
So punished for his father s act of guile.

Atreus his father ruling the Argive land
But challenged of his right to tell it plainly
By his own brother and my sire Thyestes
Drave him an exile from his country and home.
Then poor Thyestes coming back to Argos
A humble suppliant at his brother s hearth
Obtained remission of the doom of death
And Atreus feigning gladness that these fields
Should not be darkened with fraternal blood
Received him at a banquet with great show
But little heart of hospitality
As holding a high day of sacrifice
He set before him—his own children s flesh
The feet and hands with tell tale finger tips
He kept concealed where by himself he sate
At head o the board and with those marks away
My father knew not but received and ate
What brought unbounded sorrow as thou seest
To all our race For when he came to know
The horror that was brought sickening he fell
Back from that carnage with a cry and laid
This dreadful curse on the Pelopidae
That as he kicked the banquet to the ground
All Pelops line might have like overthrow
Hence came *his* fall you now behold

And I
Have the best right to have contrived his death.
I my poor father s thirteenth child was driven
Along with him a babe in swaddling bands
Now Justice brings me home a man indeed
And while still out of doors I laid my hand
On this mine enemy with plans secure
Weaving the plot that should entangle him

So that to-day I were not loth to die,
Seeing him fast in Retribution s net

CHO Aegisthus, to insult over the fallen
Wins not my homage You confess to have slain
Agamemnon by your will alone to have planned
This piteous massacre! The people s curse
Awaits thee be thou sure with stones to boot.

AEG *Thou say st it! thou that pliest the nether oar*
While those on the top-bench manage the spear!
Thine age shall find how hard a lesson tis
When old men have to learn obedience
Bondage and prison fare combined with eld
Work miracles in healing froward spirits
Behold the proverb here exemplified —
Kick not at goad pricks else your heels shall rue!

CHO (*to* CLY) Woman and when the king returned from war
Hadst thou that kept his house, shaming moreover
Thy husband s bed prepared for him this death?

[CLYTEMNESTRA *remains silent*

AEG Again your tongue leads you the way to woe!
The opposite of Orpheus voice is thine
He drew all after him with charming lay
But thou with foolish clamour rousing wrath
Shalt be dragged off that power may humble

CHO Methinks I see thee lord of Argive men!
That, when thou hadst devised this massacre,
Too craven wert thyself to strike the blow

AEG Guile was the woman s function I
Had waked suspicion from our ancient feud—
His wealth is mine to use, and I will use it
To rule your city He that disobeys
Shall be bowed down beneath my heavy yoke,

No minion of the side trace and the stall!
Darkness and hunger grooming him together
In harsh consent shall join to make him tame

CHO Thou didst not quell him coward that thou wert
Thou durst not cope with him a woman slew him
Staining our country and our country s gods!
O that Orestes if he lives to-day
Might yet return auspiciously to Argos
And kill both tyrants in his prime of power!

AEG So ye choose that line of talk and conduct! Ye shall quickly find——
Ho brave guards come rally round me! Here s a field-dav to your mind

CHO Come let every man make ready for the encounter sword in hand!

AEG Come I dare the death in combat for mine empire o er the land

CHO Death! that word is right I embrace it Fortune let the omen stand!

CLY Dearest one let strife have ending Add not to the heap of ill
As it is of troublous labour we are doomed to reap our fill
Woes enow are here already let not blood o erpass the bound
Back ye dotards know your places! Run in your appointed round
Lest ye rue the deeds ye ponder let your rude contention cease!

Might but this be all of sorrow we would bargain now for peace
Harassed by the heavy heel of God that trampled on our lot

So resolves my woman s wisdom whether men give heed or not

AEG Can I hear that these should idly from submission break away
Flaunting proud rebellious phrases in defiance of my sway
Holding light the Power that guides us as our Providence to-day?

CHO Men of Argos ne er will cringe in homage to a man of crime

AEG *You shall yet repeat that language visited in after time*

CHO Not if God direct Orestes homeward for his people s good

AEG Well I know that men in exile make of Hope their daily food

CHO *Do thy worst! Grow fat polluting Justice It is now thine hour*

AEG Know that one day for this folly thou shalt an swer to my power

CHO Boast thee without fear exulting like a cock beside the hen!

CLY *Care not for the idle yelpings of* these old and feeble men
I and thou together ruling with a firm and even hand
Will control and keep in order both the palace and the land

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

OEDIPUS
THE PRIEST OF ZEUS
CREON
CHORUS OF THEBAN ELDERS
TEIRESIAS
JOCASTA
MESSENGER
HERD OF LAIUS
SECOND MESSENGER.

SCENE —Thebes Before the Palace of Oedipus.

ARGUMENT

To Laius King of Thebes an oracle foretold that the child born to him by his queen Jocasta would slay his father and wed his mother So when in time a son was born the infant s feet were riveted together and he was left to die on Mount Cithaeron But a shepherd found the babe and tended him and delivered him to another shepherd who took him to his master the King of Corinth Polybus being childless adopted the boy who grew up believing that he was indeed the King s son Afterwards doubting his parentage he inquired of the Delphic god and heard himself the weird declared before to Laius Wherefore he fled from what he deemed his father s house and in his flight he encountered and unwittingly slew his father Laius Arriving at Thebes he answered the riddle of the Sphinx and the grateful Thebans made their deliverer king So he reigned in the room of Laius and espoused the widowed queen Children were born to them and Thebes prospered under his rule, but again a grievous plague fell upon the city Again the oracle was consulted and it bade them purge themselves of blood guiltiness Oedipus denounces the crime of which he is unaware, and undertakes to track out the criminal Step by step it is brought home to him that he is the man The closing scene reveals Jocasta slain by her own hand and Oedipus blinded by his own act and praying for death or exile.

OEDIPUS THE KING

Suppliants of all ages are seated round the altar at the palace doors at their head a PRIEST OF ZEUS
To them enter OEDIPUS

OEDIPUS

My children latest born to Cadmus old
Why sit ye here as suppliants in your hands
Branches of olive filleted with wool?
What means this reek of incense everywhere,
And everywhere laments and litanies?
Children it were not meet that I should learn
From others and am hither come myself
I Oedipus your world renowned king
Ho! aged sire whose venerable locks
Proclaim thee spokesman of this company
Explain your mood and purport Is it dread
Of ill that moves you or a boon ye crave?
My zeal in your behalf ye cannot doubt
Ruthless indeed were I and obdurate
If such petitioners as you I spurned

PRIEST

Yea Oedipus my sovereign lord and king
Thou seest how both extremes of age besiege
Thy palace altars—fledglings hardly winged
And greybeards bowed with years priests as am I
Of Zeus and these the flower of our youth
Meanwhile the common folk, with wreathèd boughs

Crowd our two market places or before
Both shrines of Pallas congregate or where
Ismenus gives his oracle by fire
For as thou seest thyself our ship of State,
Sore buffeted can no more lift her head
Foundered beneath a weltering surge of blood
A blight is on our harvest in the ear
A blight upon the grazing flocks and herds
A blight on wives in travail and withal
Armed with his blazing torch the God of Plague
Hath swooped upon our city emptying
The house of Cadmus and the murky realm
Of Pluto is full fed with groans and tears
  Therefore O King here at thy hearth we sit,
I and these children not as deeming thee
A new divinity but the first of men
First in the common accidents of life,
And first in visitations of the Gods
Art thou not he who coming to the town
Of Cadmus freed us from the tax we paid
To the fell songstress? Nor hadst thou received
Prompting from us or been by others schooled
No by a god inspired (so all men deem
And testify) didst thou renew our life
And now O Oedipus our peerless king
All we thy votaries beseech thee find
Some succour whether by a voice from heaven
Whispered or haply known by human wit
Tried counsellors methinks are aptest found[1]
To furnish for the future pregnant rede
Upraise O chief of men upraise our State!

[1] Dr Kenn dy and others r der Since to men of experience I see that also comparisons of their counsels a e in most lively use

Look to thy laurels! for thy zeal of yore
Our country s saviour thou art justly hailed
O never may we thus record thy reign —
He raised us up only to cast us down
Uplift us build our city on a rock
Thy happy star ascendant brought us luck
O let it not decline! If thou wouldst rule
This land as now thou reignest better sure
To rule a peopled than a desert realm
Nor battlements nor galleys aught avail
If men to man and guards to guard them fail

OEDIPUS

Ah! my poor children known ah known too well
The quest that brings you hither and your need
Ye sicken all well wot I yet my pain
How great soever yours outtops it all
Your sorrow touches each man severally
Him and none other but I grieve at once
Both for the general and myself and you
Therefore ye rouse no sluggard from day dreams
Many my children are the tears I ve wept
And threaded many a maze of weary thought
Thus pondering one clue of hope I caught
And tracked it up I have sent Menoeceus son
Creon my consort s brother to inquire
Of Pythian Phoebus at his Delphic shrine,
How I might save the State by act or word
And now I reckon up the tale of days
Since he set forth and marvel how he fares
'Tis strange this endless tarrying passing strange.
But when he comes then I were base indeed
If I perform not all the god declares

PRIEST

Thy words are well timed even as thou speakest
That shouting tells me Creon is at hand

OEDIPUS

O King Apollo! may his joyous looks
Be presage of the joyous news he brings!

PRIEST

As I surmise tis welcome else his head
Had scarce been crowned with berry laden bays.

OEDIPUS

We soon shall know he s now in earshot range.
Enter CREON
My royal cousin say Menoeceus child
What message hast thou brought us from the god?

CREON

Good news for e en intolerable ills
Finding right issue tend to naught but good

OEDIPUS

How runs the oracle? thus far thy words
Give me no ground for confidence or fear

CREON

If thou wouldst hear my message publicly
I ll tell thee straight or with thee pass within.

OEDIPUS

Speak before all the burden that I bear
Is more for these my subjects than myself

CREON

Let me report then all the god declared
King Phoebus bids us straitly extirpate
A fell pollution that infests the land
And no more harbour an inveterate sore.

OEDIPUS

What expiation means he? What s amiss?

CREON

Banishment or the shedding blood for blood
This stain of blood makes shipwreck of our state

OEDIPUS

Whom can he mean the miscreant thus denounced?

CREON

Before thou didst assume the helm of State,
The sovereign of this land was Laius

OEDIPUS

I heard as much but never saw the man

CREON

He fell and now the god s command is plain
Punish his takers-off whoe er they be

OEDIPUS

Where are they? Where in the wide world to find
The far faint traces of a bygone crime?

CREON

In this land said the god who seeks shall find
Who sits with folded hands or sleeps is blind "

OEDIPUS

Was he within his palace, or afield
Or travelling when Laius met his fate?

CREON

Abroad he started so he told us, bound
For Delphi but he never thence returned

OEDIPUS

Came there no news no fellow traveller
To give some clue that might be followed up?

CREON

But one escaped who flying for dear life
Could tell of all he saw but one thing sure

OEDIPUS

And what was that? One clue might lead us far
With but a spark of hope to guide our quest

CREON

Robbers he told us not one bandit but
A troop of knaves attacked and murdered him

OEDIPUS

Did any bandit dare so bold a stroke
Unless indeed he were suborned from Thebes?

CREON

So twas surmised but none was found to avenge
His murder mid the trouble that ensued

OEDIPUS

What trouble can have hindered a full quest
When royalty had fallen thus miserably?

CREON

The riddling Sphinx compelled us to let slide
The dim past and attend to instant needs

OEDIPUS

Well *I* will start afresh and once again
Make dark things clear Right worthy the concern
Of Phoebus worthy thine too for the dead
I also as is meet will lend my aid
To avenge this wrong to Thebes and to the god
Not for some far-off kinsman but myself
Shall I expel this poison in the blood
For whoso slew that king might have a mind
To strike me too with his assassin hand
Therefore in righting him I serve myself
Up children haste ye quit these altar stairs
Take hence your suppliant wands go summon hither
The Theban commons With the god s good help
Success is sure tis ruin if we fail

[*Exeunt* OEDIPUS *and* CREON

PRIEST

Come children let us hence these gracious words
Forestall the very purpose of our suit
And may the god who sent this oracle
Save us withal and rid us of this pest

[*Exeunt* PRIEST *and* SUPPLIAN

OEDIPUS

Ye pray tis well but would ye hear my words
And heed them and apply the remedy
Ye might perchance find comfort and relief
Mind you I speak as one who comes a stranger
To this report no less than to the crime
For how unaided could I track it far
Without a clue? Which lacking (for too late
Was I enrolled a citizen of Thebes)
This proclamation I address to all —
Thebans f any knows the man by whom
Laius son of Labdacus was slain
I summon him to make clean shrift to me
And if he shrinks let him reflect that thus
Confessing he shall scape the capital charge
For the worst penalty that shall befall him
Is banishment—unscathed he shall depart
But if an alien from a foreign land
Be known to any as the murderer
Let him who knows speak out and he shall have
Due recompense from me and thanks to boot
But if ye *still* keep silence if through fear
For self or friends ye disregard my hest
Hear what I then resolve I lay my ban
On the assassin whosoe er he be
Let no man in this land whereof I hold
The sovereign rule harbour or speak to him
Give him no part in prayer or sacrifice
Or lustral rites but hound him from your homes
For this is our defilement so the god
Hath lately shewn to me by oracles
Thus as their champion I maintain the cause

Both of the god and of the murdered King
And on the murderer this curse I lay
(On him and all the partners in his guilt) —
Wretch may he pine in utter wretchedness!
And for myself if with my privity
He gain admittance to my hearth I pray
The curse I laid on others fall on me
See that ye give effect to all my hest,
For my sake and the god s and for our land
A desert blasted by the wrath of heaven
For let alone the god s express command
It were a scandal ye should leave unpurged
The murder of a great man and your king
Nor track it home And now that I am lord
Successor to his throne his bed his wife
(And had he not been frustrate in the hope
Of issue common children of one womb
Had forged a closer bond twixt him and me
But Fate swooped down upon him) therefore I
His blood avenger will maintain his cause
As though he were my sire and leave no stone
Unturned to track the assassin or avenge
The son of Labdacus of Polydore
Of Cadmus and Agenor first of the race
And for the disobedient thus I pray
May the gods send them neither timely fruits
Of earth nor teeming increase of the womb
But may they waste and pine as now they waste,
Aye and worse stricken but to all of you
My loyal subjects who approve my acts
May Justice our ally and all the gods
Be gracious and attend you evermore.

The messengers have doubtl ss told thee—how
One course alone could rid us of the pest
To find the murderers of Laius
And slay them or expel them from the land
Therefore begrudging neither augury
Nor other divination that is thine
O save thyself thy country and hy king
Save all from this defilement of blood shed
On thee we rest This is man s highest end
To others service all his powers to lend

TEIRESIAS

Alas alas what misery to be wise
When wisdom profits nothing! This old lore
I had forgotten else I were not here

OEDIPUS

What ails thee? Why this melancholy mood?

TEIRESIAS

Let me go home prevent me not twere best
That thou shouldst bear thy burden and I mine.

OEDIPUS

For shame! no true born Theban patriot
Would thus withhold the word of prophecy

TEIRESIAS

Thy words O king are wide of the mark and I
For fear lest I too trip like thee

OEDIPUS

Oh speak
Withhold not I adjure thee if thou know st
Thy knowledge. We are all thy suppliants

TEIRESIAS

Aye for ye all are witless but my voice
Will ne er reveal my miseries—or thine[1]

OEDIPUS

What then thou knowest and yet willst not speak!
Wouldst thou betray us and destroy the State?

TEIRESIAS

I will not vex myself nor thee Why ask
Thus idly what from me thou shalt not learn?

OEDIPUS

Monster! thy silence would incense a flint
Will nothing loose thy tongue? Can nothing melt thee
Or shake thy dogged taciturnity?

TEIRESIAS

Thou blam st my mood and seest not thine own
Wherewith thou art mated no thou taxest me

OEDIPUS

And who could stay his choler when he heard
How insolently thou dost flout the State?

TEIRESIAS

Well it will come what will though I be mute

OEDIPUS

Since come it must, thy duty is to tell me

Literally not to call them thine but the Greek may be dered In orde not to reveal thine

TEIRESIAS

Poor fool to utter gibes at me which all
Here present will cast back on thee ere long

OEDIPUS

Offspring of endless Night thou hast no power
O'er me or any man who sees the sun

TEIRESIAS

No for thy weird is not to fall by me
I leave to Apollo what concerns the god

OEDIPUS

Is this a plot of Creon or thine own?

TEIRESIAS

Not Creon thou thyself art thine own bane.

OEDIPUS

O wealth and empiry and skill by skill
Outwitted in the battlefield of life
What spite and envy follow in your train!
See for this crown the State conferred on me
A gift a thing I sought not for this crown
The trusty Creon my familiar friend
Hath lain in wait to oust me and suborned
This mountebank this juggling charlatan
This tricksy beggar priest for gain alone
Keen-eyed but in his proper art stone blind
Say sirrah hast thou ever proved thyself
A prophet? When the riddling Sphinx was here
Why hadst thou no deliverance for this folk?

And yet the riddle was not to be solved
By guess-work but required the prophet s art
Wherein thou wast found lacking neither birds
Nor sign from heaven helped thee but *I* came
The simple Oedipus *I* stopped her mouth
By mother wit untaught of auguries
This is the man whom thou wouldst undermine
In hope to reign with Creon in my stead
Methinks that thou and thine abettor soon
Will rue your plot to drive the scapegoat out
Thank thy grey hairs that thou hast still to learn
What chastisement such arrogance deserves

CHORUS

To us it seems that both the seer and thou
O Oedipus have spoken angry words
This is no time to wrangle but consult
How best we may fulfil the oracle

TEIRESIAS

King as thou art free speech at least is mine
To make reply in this I am thy peer
I own no lord but Loxias him I serve
And ne er can stand enrolled as Creon s man
Thus then I answer since thou hast not spared
To twit me with my blindness—thou hast eyes
Yet see st not in what misery thou art fallen
Nor where thou dwellest nor with whom for mate.
Dost know thy lineage? Nay thou know st it not
And all unwitting art a double foe
To thine own kin the living and the dead
Aye and the dogging curse of mother and sire
One day shall drive thee like a two-edged sword

Beyond our borders and the eyes that now
See clear shall see henceforward endless night.
Ah whither shall thy bitter cry not reach
What crag in all Cithaeron but shall then
Reverberate thy wail when thou hast found
With what a hymeneal thou wast borne
Home but to no fair haven on the gale!
Aye and a flood of ills thou guessest not
Shall set thyself and children in one line
Flout then both Creon and my words for none
Of mortals shall be stricken worse than thou

OEDIPUS

Must I endure this fellow s insolence?
A murrain on thee! Get thee hence! Begone
Avaunt! and never cross my threshold more.

TEIRESIAS

I ne er had come hadst thou not bidden me.

OEDIPUS

I knew not thou wouldst utter folly else
Long hadst thou waited to be summoned here.

TEIRESIAS

Such am I—as it seems to thee a fool.
But to the parents who begat thee wise.

OEDIPUS

What sayest thou— parents ? Who begat me, speak?

TEIRESIAS

This day shall be thy birth-day and thy grave

OEDIPUS

Thou lov st to speak in riddles and dark words.

TEIRESIAS

In reading riddles who so skilled as thou?

OEDIPUS

Twit me with that wherein my greatness lies

TEIRESIAS

And yet this very greatness proved thy bane

OEDIPUS

No matter if I saved the commonwealth

TEIRESIAS

'Tis time I left thee Come boy take me home

OEDIPUS

Aye take him quickly for his presence irks
And lets me gone thou canst not plague me more.

TEIRESIAS

I go but first will tell th e why I came
Thy frown I dread not for thou canst not harm me
Hear then this man whom thou hast sought to arrest
With threats and warrants this long while the wretch
Who murdered Laius—that man is here
He passes for an alien in the land
But soon shall prove a Theban native born
And yet his fortune brings him little joy
For blind of seeing clad in beggar s weeds

For purple robes, and leaning on his staff
To a strange land he soon shall grope his way
And of the children inmates of his home
He shall be proved the brother and the sire
Of her who bare him son and husband both
Co-partner and assassin of his sire
Go in and ponder this and if thou find
That I have missed the mark henceforth declare
I have no wit nor skill in prophecy

[*Exeunt* TEIRESIAS *and* OEDIPUS

CHORUS

Who is he by voice immortal named from Pythia s rocky cell
Doer of foul deeds of bloodshed horrors that no tongue can tell?
A foot for flight he needs
Fleeter than storm swift steeds
For on his heels doth follow
Armed with the lightnings of his Sire Apollo
Like sleuth hounds too
The Fates pursue

Yea but now flashed forth the summons from Parnassus snowy peak
Near and far the undiscovered doer of this murder seek!
Now like a sullen bull he roves
Through forest brakes and upland groves
And vainly seeks to fly
The doom that ever nigh
Flits o er his head
Still by the avenging Phoebus sped,
The voice divine
From Earth s mid shrine.

Sore perplexed am I by the words of the master seer
Are they true are they false? I know not and bridle my tongue for fear
Fluttered with vague surmise nor present nor future is clear
Quarrel of ancient date or in days still near know I none
Twixt the Labdacidan house and our ruler Polybus son
Proof is there none how then can I challenge our King s good name
How in a blood feud join for an untracked deed of shame?

All wise are Zeus and Apollo and nothing is hid from their ken
They are gods and in wits a man may surpass his fellow men
But that a mortal seer knows more than I know—where
Hath this been proven? Or how without sign assured can I blame
Him who saved our State when the winged songstres came
Tested and tried in the light of us all, like gold assayed?
How can I now assent when a crime is on Oedipus laid?

CREON

Friends countrymen I learn King Oedipus
Hath laid against me a most grievous charge,
And come to you protesting If he deems
That I have harmed or injured him in aught
By word or deed in this our present trouble,
I care not to prolong my span of life,
Thus ill reputed for the calumny
Hits not a single blot, but blasts my name,

CREON

Yes and I stand to it.

OEDIPUS

Tell me how long it is since Laius

CREON

Since Laius ? I follow not thy drift.

OEDIPUS

By violent hands was spirited away

CREON

In the dim past a many years agone

OEDIPUS

Did this same prophet then pursue his craft?

CREON

Yes skilled as now and in no less repute

OEDIPUS

Did he at that time ever glance at me?

CREON

Not to my knowledge not when I was by

OEDIPUS

But was no search and inquisition made?

CREON

Surely full quest was made but nothing learnt.

OEDIPUS

Why failed the seer to tell his story *then?*

CREON

I know not and not knowing hold my tongue

OEDIPUS

This much thou knowest and canst surely tell

CREON

What mean st thou? All I know I will declare

OEDIPUS

But for thy prompting never had the seer
Ascribed to me the death of Laius

CREON

If so he says thou knowest best but I
Would put thee to the question in my turn

OEDIPUS

Question and prove me murderer if thou canst.

CREON

Then let me ask thee didst thou wed my sister?

OEDIPUS

A fact so plain I cannot well deny

CREON

And as thy consort queen she shares the throne?

OEDIPUS

I grant her freely all her heart desires

CREON

And with you twain I share the triple rule?

OEDIPUS

Yea this it is that proves thee a false friend

CREON

Not so if thou wouldst reason with thyself
As I with myself First I bid thee think
Would any mortal choose a troubled reign
Of terrors rather than secure repose
If the same power were given him? As for me,
I have no natural craving for the name
Of king preferring to do kingly deeds
And so thinks every sober minded man
Now all my needs are satisfied through thee
And I have naught to fear but were I king
My acts would oft run counter to my will
How could a title then have charms for me
Above the sweets of boundless influence?
I am not so infatuate as to grasp
The shadow when I hold the substance fast
Now all men cry me Godspeed! wish me well,
And every suitor seeks to gain my ear
If he would hope to win a grace from thee
Why should I leave the better choose the worse?
That were sheer madness and I am not mad
No such ambition ever tempted me
Nor would I have a share in such intrigue

And if thou doubt me first to Delphi go
There ascertain if my report was true
Of the god s answer next investigate
If with the seer I plotted or conspired
And if it prove so sentence me to death
Not by thy voice alone but mine and thine
But O condemn me not without appeal
On bare suspicion 'Tis not right to adjudge
Bad men at random good or good men bad
I would as lief a man should cast away
The thing he counts most precious his own life,
As spurn a true friend Thou wilt learn in time
The truth for time alone reveals the just
A villain is detected in a day

CHORUS

To one who walketh warily his words
Commend themselves swift counsels are not sure

OEDIPUS

When with swift strides the stealthy plotter stalks
I must be quick too with my counterplot.
To wait his onset passively for him
Is sure success for me assured defeat

CREON

What then s thy will? To banish me the land?

OEDIPUS

I would not have thee banished no but dead,
That men may mark the wages envy reaps

CREON

I see thou wilt not yield nor credit me.

OEDIPUS

[None but a fool would credit such as thou]

CREON

Thou art not wise

OEDIPUS

Wise for myself at least.

CREON

Why not for me too?

OEDIPUS

Why for such a knave?

CREON

Suppose thou lackest sense

OEDIPUS

Yet kings must rule.

CREON

Not if they rule ill

OEDIPUS

O my Thebans hear him!

CREON

Thy Thebans? am not I a Theban too?

CHORUS

Cease princes lo there comes and none too soon
Jocasta from the palace Who so fit

As peacemaker to reconcile your feud?
Enter JOCASTA

JOCASTA

Misguided princes why have ye upraised
This wordy wrangle? Are ye not ashamed
While the whole land lies stricken thus to voice
Your private injuries? Go in my lord
Go home my brother and forbear to make
A public scandal of a petty grief

CREON

My royal sister Oedipus thy lord
Hath bid me choose (O dread alternative!)
An outlaw s exile or a felon s death

OEDIPUS

Yes lady I have caught him practising
Against my royal person his vile arts

CREON

May I ne er speed but die accursed if I
In any way am guilty of this charge

JOCASTA

Believe him I adjure thee Oedipus
First for his solemn oath s sake, then for mine,
And for thine elders sake who wait on thee

CHORUS

Hearken King reflect, we pray thee be not stubborn but relent.

OEDIPUS

Say to what should I consent?

CHORUS

Respect a man whose probity and troth
Are known to all and now confirmed by oath

OEDIPUS

Dost know what grace thou cravest?

CHORUS

Yea I know

OEDIPUS

Declare it then and make thy meaning plain

CHORUS

Brand not a friend whom babbling tongues assail
Let not suspicion gainst his oath prevail

OEDIPUS

Bethink you that in seeking this ye seek
In very sooth my death or banishment?

CHORUS

No by the leader of the host divine!
Witness thou Sun such thought was never mine,
Unblest unfriended may I perish
If ever I such wish did cherish!
But O my heart is desolate
Musing on our stricken State
Doubly fall n should discord grow
Twixt you twain to crown our woe

OEDIPUS

Well, let him go no matter what it cost me,
Or certain death or shameful banishment
For your sake I relent, not his and him
Where er he be, my heart shall still abhor

CREON

Thou art as sullen in thy yielding mood
As in thine anger thou wast truculent
Such tempers justly plague themselves the most.

OEDIPUS

Leave me in peace and get thee gone.

CREON

I go
By thee misjudged but justified by these

[*Exit* CREON

CHORUS

Lady lead indoors thy consort wherefore longer here delay?

JOCASTA

Tell me first how rose the fray

CHORUS

Rumours bred unjust suspicions and injustice rankles sore.

JOCASTA

Were both at fault then?

CHORUS

Both

JOCASTA

What was the tale?

CHORUS

Ask me no more. The land is sore distressed
'Twere better sleeping ills to leave at rest

OEDIPUS

Strange counsel friend! I know thou mean st me well
And yet would st mitigate and blunt my zeal

CHORUS

King I say it once again
Witless were I proved insane
If I lightly put away
Thee my country s prop and stay
Pilot who in danger sought
To a quiet haven brought
Our distracted State and now
Who can guide us right but thou?

JOCASTA

Let me too I adjure thee know O king
What cause has stirred this unrelenting wrath

OEDIPUS

I will for thou art more to me than these
Lady the cause is Creon and his plots

JOCASTA

But what provoked the quarrel? make this clear

OEDIPUS

He points me out as Laius murderer

JOCASTA

Of his own knowledge or upon report?

OEDIPUS

He is too cunning to commit himself
And makes a mouthpiece of a knavish seer

JOCASTA

Then thou mayst ease thy conscience on that score.
Listen and I ll convince thee that no man
Hath scot or lot in the prophetic art
Here is the proof in brief An oracle
Once came to Laius (I will not say
'Twas f om the Delphic god himself but from
His ministers) declaring he was doomed
To perish by the hand of his own son
A child that should be born to him by me
Now Laius—so at least report affirmed—
Was murdered on a day by highwaymen
No natives at a spot where three roads meet.
As for the child it was but three days old
When Laius its ankles pierced and pinned
Together gave it to be cast away
By others on the trackless mountain side.
So then Apollo brought it not to pass
The child should be his father s murderer
Or the dread terror find accomplishment
And Laius be slain by his own son
Such was the prophet s horoscope O king

JOCASTA

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OEDIPUS

I will for thou art more to me than these
Lady the cause is Creon and his plots

JOCASTA

But what provoked the quarrel? make this clear

OEDIPUS

He points me out as Laius murderer

JOCASTA

Of his own knowledge or upon report?

OEDIPUS

He is too cunning to commit himself
And makes a mouthpiece of a knavish seer

JOCASTA

Then thou mayst ease thy conscience on that score
Listen and I ll convince thee that no man
Hath scot or lot in the prophetic art
Here is the proof in brief An oracle
Once came to Laius (I will not say
'Twas from the Delphic god himself but from
His ministers) declaring he was doomed
To perish by the hand of his own son
A child that should be born to him by me
Now Laius—so at least report affirmed—
Was murdered on a day by highwaymen
No natives at a spot where three roads meet.
As for the child it was but three days old
When Laius its ankles pierced and pinned
Together gave it to be cast away
By others on the trackless mountain side.
So then Apollo brought it not to pass
The child should be his father s murderer,
Or the dread terror find accomplishment,
And Laius be slain by his own son
Such was the prophet s horoscope O king.

Regard it not Whate er the god deems fit
To search himself unaided will reveal

OEDIPUS

What memories what wild tumult of the soul
Came o er me lady as I heard thee speak!

JOCASTA

What mean st thou? What has shocked and startled the

OEDIPUS

Methought I heard thee say that Laius
Was murdered at the meeting of three roads

JOCASTA

So ran the story that is current still

OEDIPUS

Where did this happen? Dost thou know the place?

JOCASTA

Phocis the land is called the spot is where
Branch roads from Delphi and from Daulis meet

OEDIPU

And how long is it since these things befell?

JOCASTA

Twas but a brief while ere thou wast proclaimed
Our country s ruler that the news was brought

OEDIPUS

O Zeus what hast thou willed to do with me!

JOCASTA

What is it Oedipus that moves thee so?

OEDIPUS

Ask me not yet tell me the build and height
Of Laius? Was he still in manhood s prime?

JOCASTA

Tall was he and his hair was lightly strewn
With silver and not unlike thee in form

OEDIPUS

O woe is me! Methinks unwittingly
I laid but *now a dread curse on myself*

JOCASTA

What say st thou? When I look on thee, my king
I tremble.

OEDIPUS

'Tis a dread presentiment
That in the end the seer will prove not blind
One further question to resolve my doubt

JOCASTA

I quail but ask and I will answer all

OEDIPUS

Had *he but few* attendants or a train
Of armed retainers with him, like a prince?

JOCASTA

They were but five in all and one of them
A *herald* Laius in a mule-car rode.

OEDIPUS

Alas! tis clear as noonday now But say
Lady who carried this report to Thebes?

JOCASTA

A serf the sole survivor who returned

OEDIPUS

Haply he is at hand or in the house?

JOCASTA

No for as soon as he returned and found
Thee reigning in the stead of Laius slain
He clasped my hand and supplicated me
To send him to the alps and pastures where
He might be farthest from the sight of Thebes
And so I sent him Twas an honest slave
And well deserved some better recompense

OEDIPUS

Fetch him at once I fain would see the man

JOCASTA

He shall be brought but wherefore summon him?

OEDIPUS

Lady I fear my tongue has overrun
Discretion therefore I would question him

JOCASTA

Well he shall come but may not I too claim
To share this burden of thy heart my king?

OEDIPUS

And thou shalt not be frustrate of thy wish
Now my imaginings have gone so far
Who has a higher claim than thou to hear
My tale of dire adventures? Listen then
My sire was Polybus of Corinth and
My mother Merope a Dorian
And I was held the foremost citizen
Till a strange thing befell me strange indeed
Yet scarce deserving all the heat it stirred
A roisterer at some banquet flown with wine,
Shouted Thou art not true son of thy sire
It irked me but I stomached for the nonce
The insult on the morrow I sought out
My mother and my sire and questioned them
They were indignant at the random slur
Cast on my parentage and did their best
To comfort me but still the venomed barb
Rankled for still the scandal spread and grew
So privily without their leave I went
To Delphi and Apollo sent me back
Baulked of the knowledge that I came to seek
But other grievous things he prophesied
Woes lamentations mourning portents dire
To wit I should defile my mother s bed
And raise up seed too loathsome to behold
And slay the father from whose loins I sprang
Warned by the oracle I turned and fled –
And Corinth henceforth was to me unknown
Save as I knew its region by the stars —
Whither I cared not, so I never might
Behold my doom of infamy fulfilled

Not I alone but all our townfolk heard it
E en should he vary somewhat in his story,
He cannot make the death of Laius
In any wise jump with the oracle
For Loxias said expressly he was doomed
To die by my child s hand but he poor babe
He shed no blood but perished first himself
So much for divination Henceforth I
Will look for signs neither to right nor left

OEDIPUS

Thou reasonest well Still I would have thee send
And fetch the bondsman hither See to it

JOCASTA

That will I straightway Come let us within
I would do nothing that my lord mislikes
[*Exeunt* OEDIPUS *and* JOCASTA

CHORUS

My lot be still to lead
The life of innocence and fly
Irreverence in word or deed
To follow still those laws ordained on high
Whose birthplace is the bright ethereal sky
No mortal birth they own
Olympus their progenitor alone
Ne er shall they slumber in oblivion cold
The god in them is strong and grows not old

Of insolence is bred
The tyrant insolence full blown
With empty riches surfeited

Scales the precipitous height and grasps the throne,
    Then topples o er and lies in ruin prone
    No foothold on that dizzy steep
But O may Heaven the true patriot keep
Who burns with emulous zeal to serve the State.
God is my help and hope, on him I wait

But the proud sinner or in word or deed
    That will not Justice heed
    Nor reverence the shrine
    Of ima,es divine
Perdition seize his vain imaginings
    If urged by greed profane
    He grasps at ill got gain
And lays an impious hand on holiest things
    Who when such deeds are done
    Can hope heaven s bolts to shun?
If sin like this to honour can aspire
Why dance I still and lead the sacred choir?

No more I ll seek earth s central oracle,
    Or Abae s hallowed cell
    Nor to Olympia bring
    My votive offering
If before all God s truth be not made plain.
    O Zeus reveal thy might
    King if thou rt named aright
Omnipotent all seeing as of old
    For Laius is forgot
    His weird men heed it not
Apollo is forsook and faith grows cold

Enter JOCASTA

JOCASTA

Quick, maiden bear these tidings to my lord
Ye god sent oracles where stand ye now!
This is the man whom Oedipus long shunned
In dread to prove his murderer and now
He dies in nature s course not by his hand.
Enter OEDIPUS

OEDIPUS

My wife my queen Jocasta why hast thou
Summoned me from my palace?

JOCASTA

Hear this man,
And as thou hearest judge what has become
Of all those awe inspiring oracles

OEDIPUS

Who is this man and what his news for me?

JOCASTA

He comes from Corinth and his message this
Thy father Polybus hath passed away

OEDIPUS

What? let me have it stranger from thy mouth

MESSENGER

If I must first make plain beyond a doubt
My message know that Polybus is dead

OEDIPUS

By treachery or by sickness visited?

MESSENGER

One touch will send an old man to his rest.

OEDIPUS

So of some malady he died poor man

MESSENGER

Yes having measured the full span of years

OEDIPUS

Out on it, lady! why should one regard
The Pythian hearth or birds that scream i the air?
Did they not point at me as doomed to slay
My father? but he s dead and in his grave
And here am I who ne er unsheathed a sword
Unless the longing for his absent son
Killed him and so *I* slew him in a sense
But as they stand the oracles are dead—
Dust ashes nothing dead as Polybus

JOCASTA

Say did not I foretell this long ago?

OEDIPUS

Thou didst but I was misled by my fear

JOCASTA

Then let it no more weigh upon thy soul.

OEDIPUS

Must I not fear my mother s marriage bed?

JOCASTA

Why should a mortal man the sport of chance,
With no assured foreknowledge be afraid?
Best live a careless life from hand to mouth
This wedlock with thy mother fear not thou
How oft it chances that in dreams a man
Has wed his mother! He who least regards
Such brainsick phantasies lives most at ease

OEDIPUS

I should have shared in full thy confidence
Were not my mother living sir e she lives
Though half convinced I still must live in dread

JOCASTA

And yet thy sire s death lights our darkness much

OEDIPUS

Much but my fear is touching her who lives

MESSENGER

Who may this woman be whom thus you fear?

OEDIPUS

Merope stranger wi e of Polybus

MESSENGER

And what of her can cause you any fear?

OEDIPUS

A heaven sent oracle of dread import

MESSENGER

A mystery or may a stranger hear it?

OEDIPUS

Aye tis no secret Loxias once foretold
That I should mate with mine own mother and shed
With my own hands the blood of my own sire
Hence Corinth was for many a year to me
A home far distant and I throve abroad
But missed the sweetest sight my parents face

MESSENGER

Was this the fear that exiled thee from home?

OEDIPUS

Yea and the dread of slaying my own sire

MESSENGER

Why since I came to give thee pleasure King
Have I not rid thee of this second fear?

OEDIPUS

Well thou shalt have due guerdon for thy pains

MESSENGER

Well I confess what chiefly made me come
Was hope to profit by thy coming home

OEDIPUS

Nay I will ne er go near my parents more

MESSENGER

My son tis plain thou know st not what thou doest.

OEDIPUS

How so old man? For heaven s sake tell me all

MESSENGER

If this is why thou dreadest to return

OEDIPUS

Yea lest the god s word be fulfilled in me.

MESSENGER

Lest through thy parents thou shouldst be accursed?

OEDIPUS

This and none other is my constant dread

MESSENGER

Dost thou not know thv fears are baseless all?

OEDIPUS

How baseless if I am their very son?

MESSENGER

Since Polybus was naught to thee in blood

OEDIPUS

What say st thou? was not Polybus my sire?

MESSENGER

As much thy sire as I am and no more

OEDIPUS

My sire no more to me than one who is naught!

MESSFNGER

Since I begat thee not, no more did he.

OEDIPUS

What reason had he then to call me son?

MESSENGER

Know that he took thee from my hands, a gift

OEDIPUS

Yet if no child of his he loved me well

MESSENGER

A childless man till then he warmed to thee

OEDIPUS

A foundling or a purchased slave this child?

MESSENGER

I found thee in Cithaeron s wooded glens

OEDIPUS

What led thee to explore those upland glades?

MESSENGER

My business was to tend the mountain flocks

OEDIPUS

A vagrant shepherd journeying for hire?

MESSENGER

True but thy saviour in that hour my son.

OEDIPUS

My saviour? from what harm? what ailed me then?

MESSENGER

Those ankle joints are evidence enow

OEDIPUS

Ah why remind me of that ancient sore?

MESSENGER

I loosed the pin that riveted thy feet

OEDIPUS

Yes from my cradle that dread brand I bore

MESSENGER

Whence thou deriv st the name that still is thine

OEDIPUS

Who did it? I adjure thee tell me who
Say was it father mother?

MESSENGER

I know not
The man from whom I had thee may know more.

OEDIPUS

What did another find me not thyself?

MESSENGER

Not I another shepherd gave thee me

OEDIPUS

Who was he? Would st thou know again the man?

MESSENGER

He passed indeed for one of Laius

OEDIPUS

The king who ruled the country long ago?

MESSENGER

The same he was a herdsman of the king

OEDIPUS

And is he living still for me to see him?

MESSENGER

His fellow-countrymen should best know that

OEDIPUS

Doth any bystander among you know
The herd he speaks of or bv seeing him
Afield or in the city? answer straight!
The hour hath come to clear this business up

CHORUS

Methinks he means none other than the hind
Whom thou anon wert fain to see but that
Our queen Jocasta best of all could tell

OEDIPUS

Madam dost know the man ve ent to fetch?
Is he the same of whom the stranger speaks?

JOCASTA

Who is the man? What matter? Let it be
'Twere waste of thought to weigh such idle words.

OEDIPUS

No with such guiding clues I cannot fail
To bring to light the secret of my birth

JOCASTA

Oh as thou carest for thy life give o er
This quest Enough the anguish *I* endure

OEDIPUS

Be of good cheer though I be proved the son
Of a bondwoman aye through three descents
Triply a slave thy honour is unsmirched

JOCASTA

Yet humour me I pray thee do not this

OEDIPUS

I cannot I must probe this matter home

JOCASTA

'Tis for thy sake I advise thee for the best

OEDIPUS

I grow impatient of this best advice

JOCASTA

Ah mayst thou ne er discover who thou art!

OEDIPUS

Go fetch me here the herd and leave yon woman
To glory in her pride of ancestry

JOCASTA

O woe is thee poor wretch! With that last word
I leave thee henceforth silent evermore

[*Exit* JOCASTA

CHORUS

Why Oedipus why stung with passionate grief
Hath the queen thus depirted? Much I fear
From this dead calm will burst a storm of woes

OEDIPUS

Let the storm burst my fixed resolve still holds
To learn my lineage be it ne er so low
It may be she with all a woman s pride
Thinks scorn of my base parentage But I
Who rank myself as Fortune s favourite child
The giver of good gifts shall not be shamed
She is my mother and the changing moons
My brethren and with them I wax and wane
Thus sprung why should I fear to trace my birth?
Nothing can make me other than I am

CHORUS

If my soul prophetic err not if my wisdom aught avail
Thee Cithaeron I shall hail
As the nurse and foster mother of our Oedipus shall greet
Ere to-morrow s full moon rises and exalt thee as is meet.
Dance and song shall hymn thy praises lover of our royal race
Phoebus may my words find grace!
Child who bare thee nymph or goddess? sure thy sire was more than man
Haply the hill roamer Pan
Or did Loxias beget thee for he haunts the upland wold
Or Cyllene s lord or Bacchus dweller on the hill tops cold?
Did some Heliconian Oread give him thee a new-born joy
Nymphs with whom he loves to toy?

HERDSMAN

'Tis long ago but all thou say st is true

MESSENGER

Well thou must then remember giving me
A child to rear as my own foster son?

HERDSMAN

Why dost thou ask this question? What of that?

MESSENGER

Friend he that stands before thee was that child.

HERDSMAN

A plague upon thee! Hold thy wanton tongue!

OEDIPUS

Softly old man rebuke him not thy words
Are more deserving chastisement than his

HERDSMAN

O best of masters what is my offence?

OEDIPUS

Not answering what he asks about the child

HERDSMAN

He speaks at random babbles like a fool

OEDIPUS

If thou lack st grace to speak I ll loose thy tongue

HERDSMAN

For mercy s sake abuse not an old man

OEDIPUS

Arrest the villain seize and pinion him!

HERDSMAN

Alack alack!
What have I done? what wouldst thou further learn?

OEDIPUS

Didst give this man the child of whom he asks?

HERDSMAN

I did and would that I had died that d y!

OEDIPUS

And die thou shalt unless thou tell the truth

HERDSMAN

But if I tell it I am doubly lost

OEDIPUS

The knave methinks will still prevaricate

HERDSMAN

Nay I confessed I gave it long ago

OEDIPUS

Whence came it? was it thine, or given to thee?

HERDSMAN

I had it from another twas not mine

OEDIPUS

From whom of these our townsmen and what house?

HERDSMAN

Forbear for God s sake master ask no more.

OEDIPUS

If I must question thee again thou rt lost

HERDSMAN

Well then—it was a child of Laius house.

OEDIPUS

Slave born or one of Laius own race?

HERDSMAN

Ah me!
I stand upon the perilous edge of speech

OEDIPUS

And I of hearing but I still must hear

HERDSMAN

Know then the child was by repute his own,
But she within thy consort best could tell

OEDIPUS

What! she she gave it thee?

HERDSMAN

Tis so my king

OEDIPUS

With what intent?

HERDSMAN

To make away with it

OEDIPUS

What she its mother?

HERDSMAN

Fearing a dread weird

OEDIPUS

What weird?

HERDSMAN

Twas told that he should slay his sire

OEDIPUS

Why didst thou give it then to this old man?

HERDSMAN

Through pity master for the babe I thought
He d take it to the country whence he came
But he preserved it for the worst of woes
For if thou art in sooth what this man saith
God pity thee! *thou wast to misery born*

OEDIPUS

Ah me! ah me! all brought to pass all true!
O light may I behold thee nevermore!
I stand a wretch in birth in wedlock cursed
A parricide incestuous triply cursed

[*Exit*

CHORUS

Races of mortal man
Whose life is but a span
I count ye but the shadow of a shade!
For he who most doth know
Of bliss hath but the show
A moment and the visions pale and fade
Thy fall O Oedipus thy piteous fall
Warns me none born of woman blest to call

For he of marksmen best
O Zeus outshot the rest
And won the prize supreme of wealth and power
By him the vulture maid
Was quelled her witchery laid
He rose our saviour and the land s strong tower
We hailed thee king and from that day adored
Of mighty Thebes the universal lord

O heavy hand of fate!
Who now more desolate
Whose tale more sad than thine whose lot more dire!
O Oedipus discrowned head
Thy cradle was thy marriage bed
One harbourage sufficed for son and sire
How could the soil thy father eared so long
Endure to bear in silence such a wrong?

All seeing Time hath caught
Guilt and to justice brought
The son and sire commingled in one bed
O child of Laius ill starred race
Would I had ne er beheld thy face!

I raise for thee a dirge as o er the dead
Yet sooth to say through thee I drew new breath
And now through thee I feel a second death
Enter SECOND MESSENGER

SECOND MESSENGER

Most grave and reverend senators of Thebes
What deeds ye soon must hear what sights behold!
How will ye mourn if true born patriots
Ye reverence still the race of Labdacus!
Not Ister nor all Phasis flood I ween
Could wash away the blood stains from this house,
The ills it shrouds or soon will bring to light,
Ills wrought of malice not unwittingly
The worst to bear are self inflicted wounds

CHORUS

Grievous enough for all our tears and groans
Our past calamities what canst thou add?

SECOND MESSENGER

My tale is quickly told and quickly heard
Our sovereign lady queen Jocasta s dead

CHORUS

Alas poor queen! how came she by her death?

SECOND MESSENGER

By her own hand And all the horror of it,
Not having seen ye cannot apprehend
Nathless as far as my poor memory serves
I will relate the unhappy lady s woe
When in her frenzy she had passed inside
The vestibule she hurried straight to win

The bridal-chamber clutching at her hair
With both her hands and once within the room
She shut the doors behind her with a crash
Laius she cried and called her husband dead
Long long ago Her thought was of that child
By him begot the son by whom the sire
Was murdered and the mother left to breed
With her own seed a monstrous progeny
Then she bewailed the marriage bed whereon
Poor wretch she had conceived a double brood
Husband by husband children by her child
What happened after that I cannot tell
Nor how the end befel for with a shriek
Burst on us Oedipus all eyes were fixed
On Oedipu as up and down he strode
Nor could we mark her agony to the end
For stalking to and fro A sword! he cried
Where is the wife no wife the teeming womb
That bore a double harvest me and mine?
And in his frenzy some supernal power
(No mortal surely none of us who watched him)
Guided his footsteps with a terrible shriek
As though one beckoned him he crashed against
The folding doors and from their staples forced
The wrenched bolts and hurled himself within
Then we beheld the woman hanging there
A running noose entwined about her neck
But when he saw her with a maddened roar
He loosed the cord and when her wretched corpse
Lay stretched on earth what followed—O twas dread!
He tore the golden brooches that upheld
Her queenly robes upraising them high and smote
Full on his eye balls uttering words like these

No more shall ye behold such sights of woe
Deeds I have suffered and myself have wrought
Henceforward quenched in darkness shall ye see
Those ye should ne er have seen now blind to those
Whom when I saw I vainly yearned to know
Such was the burden of his moan whereto
Not once but oft he struck with hand uplift
His eyes and at each stroke the ensanguined orbs
Bedewed his beard not oozing drop by drop
But one black gory downpour thick as hail
Such evils issuing from the double source
Have whelmed them both confounding man and wife
Till now the storied fortune of this house
Was fortunate indeed but from this day
Woe lamentation ruin death disgrace
All ills that can be named all all are theirs

CHORUS

But hath he still no respite from his pain?

SECOND MESSENGER

He cries Unbar the doors and let all Thebes
Behold the slayer of his sire his mother s—
That shameful word my lips may not repeat
He vows to fly self banished from the land
Nor stay to bring upon his house the curse
Himself had uttered but he has no strength
Nor one to guide him and his torture s more
Than man can suffer as yourselves will see.
For lo the palace portals are unbarred
And soon ye shall behold a sight so sad
That he who most abhorred would pity it
Enter OEDIPUS *blinded*

CHORUS

Woeful sight! more woeful none
These sad eyes have looked upon
Whence this madness? None can tell
Who did cast on thee his spell
Prowling all thy life around
Leaping with a demon bound
Hapless wretch! how can I brook
On thy misery to look?
Though to gaze on thee I yearn
Much to question much to learn,
Horror struck away I turn

OEDIPUS

Ah me! ah woe is me!
Ah whither am I borne!
How like a ghost forlorn
My voice flits from me on the air!
On on the demon goads The end ah where?

CHORUS

An end too dread to tell too dark to see

OEDIPUS

Dark dark! The horror of darkness like a shroud
Wraps me and bears me on through mist and cloud
Ah me ah me! What spasms athwart me shoot
What pangs of agonising memory!

CHORUS

No marvel if in such a plight thou feel st
The double weight of past and present woes

OEDIPUS

Ah friend still loyal constant still and kind
Thou carest for the blind
I know thee near and though bereft of eyes
Thy voice I recognize

CHORUS

O doer of dread deeds how couldst thou mar
Thy vision thus? What demon goaded thee?

OEDIPUS

Apollo friends Apollo he it was
That brought these ills to pass
But the right hand that dealt the blow
Was mine none other How
How could I longer see when sight
Brought no delight?

CHORUS

Alas! tis as thou sayest

OEDIPUS

Say friends can any look or voice
Or touch of love henceforth my heart rejoice?
Haste friends no fond delay
Take the twice cursed away
Far from all ken
The man abhorred of gods accursed of men.

CHORUS

O thy despair well suits thy desperate case.
Would I had never looked upon thy face!

OEDIPUS

My curse on him whoe er unrived
The waif s fell fetters and my life revived!
He meant me well yet had he left me there
He had saved my friends and me a world of care.

CHORUS

I too had wished it so

OEDIPUS

Then had I never come to shed
My father s blood nor climbed my mother s bed
The monstrous offspring of a womb defiled
Co-mate of him who gendered me and child
Was ever man before afflicted thus
Like Oedipus

CHORUS

I cannot say that thou hast counselled well
For thou wert better dead than living blind

OEDIPUS

What s done was well done Thou canst never shake
My firm belief A truce to argument
For had I sight I know not with what eyes
I could have met my father in the shades
Or my poor mother since against the twain
I sinned a sin no gallows could atone
Aye but ye say the sight of children joys
A parent s eyes What born as mine were born?
No such a sight could never bring me joy
Nor this fair city with its battlements

Its temples and the statues of its gods
Sights from which I now wretchedst of all
Once ranked the foremost Theban in all Thebes
By my own sentence am cut off condemned
By my own proclamation gainst the wretch
The miscreant by heaven itself declared
Unclean—and of the race of Laius
Thus branded as a felon by myself
How had I dared to look you in the face?
Nay had I known a way to choke the springs
Of hearing I had never shrunk to make
A dungeon of this miserable frame
Cut off from sight and hearing for tis bliss
To bide in regions sorrow cannot reach
Why didst thou harbour me Cithaeron why
Didst thou not take and slay me? Then I never
Had shown to men the secret of my birth
O Polybus O Corinth O my home
Home of my ancestors (so wast thou called)
How fair a nursling then I seemed how foul
The canker that lay festering in the blood!
Now is the blight revealed of root and fruit
Ye triple high roads and thou hidden glen
Coppice and pass where meet the three branched ways,
Ye drank my blood the life blood these hands spilt
My father s do ye call to mind perchance
Those deeds of mine ye witnessed and the work
I wrought thereafter when I came to Thebes?
O fatal wedlock thou didst give me birth
And having borne me sowed again my seed
Mingling the blood of fathers brothers children
Brides wives and mothers, an incestuous brood

All horrors that are wrought beneath the sun
Horrors so foul to name them were unmeet
O I adjure you hide me anywhere
Far from this land or slay me straight or cast me
Down to the depths of ocean out of sight
Come hither deign to touch an abject wretch
Draw near and fear not I my elf must bear
The load of guilt that none but I can share
Enter CREON

CREON

Lo here is Creon the one man to grant
Thy prayer by action or advice for he
Is left the State s sole guardian in thy stead

OEDIPUS

Ah me! what words to accost him can I find?
What cause has he to trust me? In the past
I have been proved his rancorous enemy

CREON

Not in derision Oedipus I come
Nor to upbraid thee with thy past misdeeds
(*To* BYSTANDERS)
But shame upon you! if ye feel no sense
Of human decencies at least revere
The Sun whose light beholds and nurtures all
Leave not thus nakedly for all to gaze at
A horror neither earth nor rain from heaven
Nor light will suffer Lead him straight within
For it is seemly that a kinsman s woes
Be heard by kin and seen by kin alone

OEDIPUS

O listen since thy presence comes to me
A shock of glad surprise—so noble thou
And I so vile—O grant me one small boon
I ask it not on my behalf but thine

CREON

And what the favour thou wouldst crave of me?

OEDIPUS

Forth from thy borders thrust me with all speed
Set me within some vasty desert where
No mortal voice shall greet me any more.

CREON

This had I done already but I deemed
It first behoved me to consult the god

OEDIPUS

His will was set forth fully—to destroy
The parricide the scoundrel and I am he.

CREON

Yea so he spake but in our present plight
Twere better to consult the god anew

OEDIPUS

Dare ye inquire concerning such a wretch?

CREON

Yea for thyself wouldst credit now his word.

O leave them not to wander poor unwed
Thy kin nor let them share my low estate
O pity them so young and but for thee
All destitute Thy hand upon it Prince
To you my children I had much to say
Were ye but ripe to hear Let this suffice
Pray ye may find some home and live content
And may your lot prove happier than your sire s

CREON

Thou hast had enough of weeping pass within

OEDIPUS

I must obey

Though tis grievous

CREON

Weep not everything must have its day

OEDIPUS

Well I go but on conditions

CREON

What thy terms for going say

OEDIPUS

Send me from the land an exile

CREON

Ask this of the gods not me

OEDIPUS

But I am the gods abhorrence

CREON

Then they soon will grant thy plea

OEDIPUS

So thou yieldest to my pleading?

CREON

When I speak I mean it so

OEDIPUS

Lead me hence then I am willing

CREON

Come but let thy children go

OEDIPUS

Rob me not of these my children!

CREON

Crave not mastery in all
For the mastery that raised thee was thy bane and wrought thy fall

CHORUS

Look ye countrymen and Thebans this is Oedipus the great
He who knew the Sphinx s riddle and was mightiest in our state
Who for all our townsmen gazed not on his fame with envious eyes?
Now in what a sea of troubles sunk and overwhelmed he lies!

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

NURSE OF MEDEA S CHILDREN
CHILDREN S GUARDIAN[1]

MEDEA
CHORUS OF CORINTHIAN LADIES
CREON *King of Corinth*
JASON
AEGEUS *King of Athens*
MESSENGER
CHILDREN OF MEDEA

The Scene is in front of Jason s House at Corinth

[1] *Pædagogus* —A trusted servant responsible for keepi g the boys out of h rms vay h w pre e t at their sport accomp n ed them to and from school a d n ve let them b out of h s sight. A similar institution is fam liar to E glishmen resident in India

ARGUMENT

When the Heroes who sailed in the ship Argo to bring home the Golden Fleece came to the land of Colchis they found that to win that treasure was a deed passing the might of mortal man so terribly was it guarded by monsters magical even fire breathing bulls and an unsleeping dragon But Aphrodite caused Medea the sorceress daughter of Aeetes the king of the land to love Jason their captain so that by her magic he overcame the bulls and the dragon Then Jason took the Fleece and Medea withal for that he had pledged him to wed her in the land of Greece But as they fled Absyrtus her brother pursued them with a host of war yet by Medea s devising was he slain So they came to the land of Iolcos and to Pelias, who held the kingdom which was Jason s of right But Medea by her magic wrought upon Pelias daughters so that they slew their father Yet by reason of men s horror of the deed might not Jason and Medea abide in the land and they came to Corinth But there all men rejoiced for the coming of a hero so mighty in war and a lady renowned for wisdom unearthly for that Medea was grandchild of the Sun god But after ten years Creon the king of the land spake to Jason saying Lo I will give thee my daughter to wife and thou shalt reign after me if thou wilt put away thy wife Medea but her and her two sons will I banish from the land So Jasoh consented And of befell things strange and awful which are told

MEDEA

Enter NURSE *of Medea s Children*

NURSE

WOULD God that Argo s hull had never flown
Through those blue Clashing Rocks to Colchisland
Nor that the axe hewn pine in Pelion s glens
Ever had fallen nor filled with oars the hands
Of hero-princes who at Pelias hest
Quested the Golden Fleece! My mistress then
Medea ne er had sailed to Iolcos towers
With love for Jason thrilled through all her soul
Nor had on Pelias daughters wrought to slay
Their sire nor now in this Corinthian land
Dwelt with her lord and children gladdening
By this her exile them whose land received her
Yea and in all things serving Jason s weal
Which is the chief salvation of the home
When wife stands not at variance with her lord

Now all is hatred love is sickness-stricken
For Jason traitor to his babes and her
My mistress weddeth with a child of kings
Daughter of Creon ruler of the land
And slighted thus Medea hapless wife
Cries on the oaths invokes that mightiest pledge
Of the right hand and calls the Gods to witness
What recompense from Jason she receives.

Fasting with limbs in grief s abandonment
Flung down she weeps and wastes through all the days
Since first she knew her lord s wrong done to her
Never uplifting eye, nor turning ever
From earth her face No more than rock or sea wave
Hearkeneth she to friends that counsel her
Saving at whiles when lifting her white neck
To herself she wails her father once beloved
Her land her home forsaking which she came
Hither with him who holds her now contemned
Alas for her! she knows by affliction taught
How good is fatherland unforfeited
She loathes her babes joys not beholding them
And what she may devise I dread to think
Grim is her spirit one that will not brook
Mishandling yea I know her and I fear
Lest to her bridal bower she softly steal
And through her own heart thrust the whetted knife,
Or slay the king and him that weds his child
And get herself some doom yet worse thereby
For dangerous is she who begins a feud
With her not soon shall sing the triumph song
But lo her boys their racing sport put by
Draw near all careless of their mother s wrongs,
For the young heart loves not to brood in grief
Enter CHILDREN S GUARDIAN *with boys*

CHILDREN S GUARDIAN

O ancient chattel of my mistress home,
Why at the gates thus lonely standest thou,
Thyself unto thyself discoursing ills?
How wills Medea to be left of thee?

NURSE

O grey attendant thou of Jason s sons
The hearts of faithful servants still are touched
By ill betiding fortunes of their lords
For I have sunk to such a depth of grief
That yearning took me hitherward to come
And tell to earth and heaven my lady s plight

CHILDREN S GUARDIAN

Ceaseth not yet the hapless one from moan?

NURSE

Cease!—her pain scarce begun far from its height!

CHILDREN S GUARDIAN

Ah fool!—if one may say it of his lords—
Little she knoweth of the latest blow

NURSE

What is it, ancient? Grudge not thou to tell me

CHILDREN S GUARDIAN

Naught I repent me of the word that scaped me.

NURSE

Nay by thy beard hide not from fellow thrall—
Silence, if need be will I keep thereof

CHILDREN S GUARDIAN

I heard one saying—feigning not to hear
As I drew near the old stone seats, where sit
The ancients round P [illegible] hallowed fount—
Creon this land s [illegible] oint to banish

Mother and sons from soil Corinthian
Howbeit if the tale I heard be true
I know not fain were I it were not so

NURSE

Will Jason brook such dealing with his sons
Though from their mother he be wholly estranged?

CHILDREN S GUARDIAN

Old bonds of love are aye outrun by feet
Of new —no friend is *he* unto this house.

NURSE

Ruined we are then if we add fresh ill
To old ere lightened be our ship of this

CHILDREN S GUARDIAN

But thou—for tis not season that thy lady
Should know—keep silence and speak not the tale.

NURSE

Hear babes what father this is unto you!
I curse him—not he is my master still
But to his friends he stands convict of baseness

CHILDREN S GUARDIAN

What man is not? Hast learnt this only now
That no man loves his neighbour as himself?
Good cause have some with most tis greed of gain—
As here their sire for a bride s sake loves not these.

NURSE

Pass in dear children for it shall be well

But thou keep these apart to the uttermost
Bring them not nigh their mother angry souled
For late I saw her glare, as glares a bull
On these as twere for mischief nor her wrath
I know shall cease, until its lightning strike.
To foes may she work ill and not to friends!

MEDEA (*behind the scenes*)

O hapless I! O miseries heaped on mine head!
Ah me! ah me! would God I were dead!

NURSE

Lo darlings the thing that I told you!
Lo the heart of your mother astir!
And astir is her anger withhold you
From her sight come not nigh unto her
Haste get you within O beware ye
Of the thoughts as a wild beast brood
Of the nature too ruthless to spare ye
In its desperate mood

Pass ye within now departing
With all speed It is plain to discern
How a cloud of lamenting upstarting
From its viewless beginnings shall burn
In lightnings of fury yet fiercer
What deeds shall be dared of that soul
So haughty when wrong s goads p erce her
So hard to control?

[*Exeunt* CHILDREN *with* GUARDIAN

MEDEA (*behind the s enes*)

Woe! I have suffered have suffered foul wrong that ma
waken may waken

Mighty lamentings full well! O ye children accursed from the womb
Hence to destruction ye brood of a loathed one forsaken forsaken!
Hence with your father and perish our home in the blackness of doom!

NURSE

Ah me in the father s offences
What part have the babes that thine hate
Should blast them?—forlorn innocences
How sorely I fear for your fate!
How terrible princes moods are!—
Long ruling unschooled to obey—
Unforgiving unsleeping their feuds are
Better life s level way

Be it mine if in greatness I may not
In quiet and peace to grow old
Sweeter name than The Mean shall ye say not
And to taste it is sweetness untold
But to men never weal above measure
Availed on its perilous height
The Gods in their hour of displeasure
The heavier smite

Enter CHORUS *of Corinthian Ladies*

CHORUS

I have hearkened the voice of the daughter of Colchis the sound of the crying
Of the misery stricken nor yet is she stilled Now the tale of her tell
Grey woman for moaned through the porch from her chamber the wail of her sighing

And I cannot I cannot be glad while the home in affliction is lying
The house I have loved so well

NURSE

Home?—home there is none it hath vanished away
For my lord to a bride of the princess is thrall
And my lady is pining the livelong day
In her bower and for naught that her friends lips say
On her heart may the dews of comfort fall

MEDEA (*behind the scenes*)

Would God that the flame of the lightning from heaven descending descending
Might burn through mine head!—for in living wherein any more is my gain?
Alas and alas! Would God I might bring to an ending an ending
The life that I loathe, and behind me might cast all its burden of pain!

CHORUS

O Zeus Earth Light did ye hear her
How waileth the woe laden breath
Of the bride in unhappiest plight?
What yearning for vanished delight
O passion-distraught should have might
To cause thee to wish death nearer—
The ending of all things death?
Make thou not for this supplication!
If thine husband hath turned and adored
New love, that estranged he is,
O harrow thy soul not for this
It is Zeus that shall right thee, I wis.

Ah pine not in over vexation
Of spirit bewailing thy lord!

MEDEA (*behind the scenes*)

O Lady of Justice O Artemis Majesty see it O see it—
Look on the wrongs that I suffer by oaths everlasting who tied
The soul of mine husband that ne er from the curse he might free it nor free it
From your vengeance! O may I behold him at last even him and his bride
Them and these halls therewithal all shattered in ruin in ruin!—
Wretches who dare unprovoked to do to Medea despite!
O father O city whom erst I forsook for undoing un doing
And for shame when the blood of my brother I spilt on the path of my flight!

NURSE

Do ye hear what she saith and uplifteth her cry
Unto Themis and Zeus to the Suppliant s King
Oath steward of men that be born but to die?
O my lady will lay not her anger by
Soon making her vengeance a little thing

CHORUS

If she would but come forth where we wait her
If she would but give ear to the sound
Of our speech that her spirit would learn
From its fierceness of anger to turn
And her lust for revenge not burn!
O ne er may my love prove traitor
Never false to my friends be it found!

But go thou and forth of the dwelling
Thy mistress hitherward lead
Say to her that friends be we all
O hasten ere mischief befall
The lords of the palace hall
For her grief like a tempest upswelling
Resistless shall ruin ward speed

NURSE

I will do it but almost my spirit despaireth
To win her yet labour of love shall it be
But my queen on her thralls as a mad bull glareth
Or a lioness couched mid her whelps whoso dareth
With speech to draw near her so tameless is she

He should err not who named the old singers in singing
Not cunning but left handed bards for their lays
Did they frame for the mirth tide the festal inbringing
Of the wine and the feast when the harp strings are ringing
To sweeten with melody life s sweet days

But the dread doom of mortals the anguish heartrending—
Never minstrel by music hath breathed on them peace
Nor by song with his harp-notes in harmony blending
Albeit thereof cometh death s dark ending
Unto many a home that is wrecked by these

And yet were it surely a boon to bring healing
Of sorrow to mortals with song but in vain
Mid the fulness of feasting ring voices clear pealing
And the banquet itself hath a glamour concealing
From mortals their doom flinging spells over pain
[*Exit* NURSE.

CHORUS

I have heard it the sigh laden cry of the daughter
  Of Colchis, the woe shrilling anguish of wailing
For the traitor to love who with false vows caught her
  Who in strength of her wrongs chideth Heaven assailing
  The Oath-queen of Zeus who with cords all prevailing
Forth haled her and brought her o er star litten water
    Where the brine mists hover o er Pontus Key
    Unto Hellas far over the boundless sea
Enter MEDEA

MEDEA

Corinthian dames I have come forth my doors
Lest ye condemn me Many I know are held
Mis proud—some since they shrink from public gaze
Some from their bearing to their fellow men
Some quiet lives for indolence are defamed
For justice dwells not in the eyes of man
Who ere he hath discerned his neighbour s heart
Hates him at sight albeit nowise wronged
A stranger must conform to the city s wont
Nor citizens uncondemned may flout their fellows
Like mannerless churls a law unto themselves

But me—the blow ye wot of suddenly fell
Soul shattering 'Tis my ruin I have lost
All grace of life I long to die O friends
He to know whom well was mine *all in all*
My lord of all men basest hath become!
Surely of creatures that have life and wit
We women are of all unhappiest
Who first must buy as buys the high st bidder
A husband—nay we do but win for our lives

A master! Deeper depth of wrong is this
Here too is dire risk—will the lord we gain
Be evil or good? Divorce?— tis infamy
To us we may not even reject a suitor!

Then coming to new customs habits new
One need be a seer to know the thing unlearnt
At home what manner of man her mate shall be
And *if* we learn our lesson *if* our lord
Dwell with us plunging not against the yoke
Happy our lot is else—no help but death
For the man when the home yoke galls his neck
Goes forth to ease a weary sickened heart
By turning to some friend some kindred soul
We to one heart alone can look for comfort

But we say they live an unperilled life
At home while they do battle with the spear—
Unreasoning fools! Thrice would I under shield
Stand rather than bear childbirth peril once

But ah thy story is not one with mine!
Thine is this city thine a father s home
Thine bliss of life and fellowship of friends
But I lone cityless and outraged thus
Of him who kidnapped me from foreign shores,
Mother nor brother have I kinsman none
For port of refuge from calamity
Wherefore I fain would win of thee this boon —
If any path be found me, or device,
Whereby to avenge these wrongs upon mine husband
On her who weds on him who gives the bride

[1] A Greek girl s husband was ch sen for her by he par ts.

Keep silence Woman quails at every peril
Faint heart to face the fray and look on steel
But when in wedlock rights she suffers wrong
No spirit more bloodthirsty shall be found

CHORUS

This will I for tis just that thou Medea
Requite thy lord no marvel thou dost grieve
But I see Creon ruler of this land
Advancing herald of some new decree
Enter CREON

CREON

Black lowering woman wroth against thy lord
Medea forth this land I bid thee fare
An exile taking thy two sons with thee
And make no tarrying daysman of this cause
Am I and homeward go I not again
Ere from the land s bounds I have cast thee forth

MEDEA

Ah me! undone am I in utter ruin!
My foes crowd sail pursuing landing place
Is none from surges of calamity
Yet howso wronged one question will I ask—
For what cause Creon dost thou banish me?

CREON

I fear thee—need is none to cloak my words—
Lest thou wreak cureless vengeance on my child
And to this dread do many things conspire
Wise art thou cunning in much evil lore

Chafed art thou of thine husband s couch bereft
I hear thou threatenest so they bring me word
To wreak on sire on bridegroom and on bride
Mischief I guard mine head ere falls the blow
Better be hated woman now of thee
Than once relent and sorely groan too late

MEDEA

Not now first Creon—many a time ere now
Rumour hath wronged and wrought me grievous harm
Ne er should the man whose heart is sound of wit
Let teach his sons more wisdom than the herd
They are burdened with unprofitable lore
And spite and envy of other folk they earn
For if thou bring strange wisdom unto dullards
Useless shalt thou be counted and not wise
And if thy fame outshine those heretofore
Held wise thou shalt be odious in men s eyes
Myself too in this fortune am partaker
Of some my wisdom wins me jealousy
Some count me spiritless outlandish some
Unsocial some Yet no deep lore is mine
And thou thou fear st me, lest I work thee harm
Not such am I—O Creon dread not me—
That against princes I should dare transgress
How hast thou wronged me? Thou hast given thy child
To whomso pleased thee But—I hate mine husband
So doubtless this in prudence hast thou done
Nay but I grudge not thy prosperity
Wed ye and prosper But in this your land
Still let me dwell for I how wronged soe er
Will hold my peace o ermastered by the strong

CREON

Soft words to hear!—but in thine inmost heart
I fear thou plottest mischief all the while
And all the less I trust thee than before
The vehement hearted woman—yea or man—
Is easier watched for than the silent-cunning
Nay forth with all speed plead me pleadings none
For this is stablished no device hast thou
To bide with us who art a foe to me

MEDEA (*clasping his feet*)

Nay—by thy knees and by the bride thy child!

CREON

Thou wastest words thou never shalt prevail

MEDEA

Wilt drive me forth respecting naught my prayers?

CREON

Ay more I love not thee than mine own house

MEDEA

My country! O I call thee now to mind!

CREON

Ay next my children dear to me is Corinth

MEDEA

Alas! to mortals what a curse is love!

CREON

Blessing or curse I trow as fortune falls

MEDEA

Zeus Zeus forget not him who is cause of this!

CREON

Hence passionate fool and rid me of my trouble

MEDEA

Troubled am I new troubles need I none

CREON

Soon shalt thou be by servants hands thrust out

MEDEA

Nay—nay—not this O Creon I implore!

CREON

So woman thou it seems wilt make a coil

MEDEA

I will flee forth —not this the boon I crave

CREON

Why restive then?—why rid not Corinth of thee?

MEDEA

Suffer me yet to tarry this one day
And somewhat for our exile to take thought
And find my babes a refuge since their sire
Cares naught to make provision for his sons
Compassionate these—a father too art thou
Of children—meet it is thou show them grace
Not for myself I fret if I be banished
For them in their calamity I mourn

CREON

My spirit least of all is tyrannous
Many a plan have my relentings marred
And woman now I know I err herein
Yet shalt thou win this boon But I forewarn thee,
If thee the approaching Sun god s torch behold
Within this country s confines with thy sons
Thou diest —the word is said that shall not lie
Now if remain thou must remain one day—
Too short for thee to do the deeds I dread [*Exit*

CHORUS

O hapless thou!
Woe s me for thy misery woe for the trouble and anguish that meet thee!
Whitherward wilt thou turn thee?—what welcoming hand mid the strangers shall greet thee?
What home or what land to receive thee deliverance from evils to give thee
Wilt thou find for thee now?
How mid surge of despair to o erwhelm thee in ruin God s hand on thine helm
Hath steered O Medea thy prow!

MEDEA

Wronged—wronged by God and man! Who shall gainsay?
But is it mere despair?—deem not so yet
Bridegroom and bride grim wrestlings yet await
Nor troubles light abide these marriage makers
Dost think that I had cringed to yon man ever
Except to gain some gain or work some wile?
Nor word nor touch of hand had I vouchsafed him!
But to such height of folly hath he come,

That when he might forestall mine every plot
By banishment this day of grace he grants me
To stay wherein three foes will I lay dead
The father and the daughter and mine husband
And having for them many paths of death
Which first to take in hand I know not, friends—
To fire yon palace midst their marriage feast
Or to steal softly to their bridal bower
And through their two hearts thrust the whetted knife
Yet one thing bars the way—if I be found
Crossing the threshold of the house and plotting
Die shall I mid the mocking laughter of foes

Best the sure path wherein my nature s cunning
Excels by poisons to destroy them—yea
Now grant them dead what city will receive me,
What ho vouchsafe a land of refuge home
Secure, and from the avenger shield my life?
There is none Tarrying then a little space
If any tower of safety shall appear
These deaths by guile and silence will I compass
But if misfortune drive me desperate forth
Myself will grip the sword—yea though I die—
And slay and dare the strong hand s reckless deed

Ah by the Queen of Night whom I revere
Above all and for fellow worker chose,
Hecate dweller by mine hearth s dark shrine
None none shall vex my soul and rue it not
Bitter and woeful bridal will I give them
Bitter troth plight and banishing of me

Up then!—spare naught of all thy sorcery lore,
Medea of thy plotting and contriving

On to the dread deed! Now is need of daring
Look on thy wrongs thou must not make derision
For sons of Sisyphus for Jason s bride—
Thou sprung from royal father from the Sun!
Thou know st the means I prove me woman indeed!
Men say we are most helpless for all good
But of dark deeds most cunning fashioners

CHORUS

Upward and back to their fountains the sacred rivers are stealing
Justice is turned to injustice the order of old to confusion
The thoughts of the hearts of men are treachery wholly and reeling
From its ancient foundations the faith of the Gods is become a delusion
Everywhere change!—even me men s voices henceforth shall honour
My life shall be sunlit with glory for woman the old time story
Is ended the slanders hoary no more shall as chains be upon her
And the strains of the singers of old generations for shame shall falter
Which sang evermore of the treason of woman her faithlessness ever
Ala that our lips are not touched with the fire of song from the altar
Of Phoebus the Harper king of the inspiration giver!
Else had I lifted my voice in challenge of song high ringing
Unto men for the roll of the ages shall find for the poet sages

Proud woman themes for their pages heroines worthy their singing
But thou from the ancient home didst sail over leagues of foam
On sped by a frenzied heart and the sea gates sawest dispart
The Twin Rocks Now in the land
Of the stranger thy doom is to waken
To a widowed couch and forsaken
Of thy lord and woe-overtaken
To be cast forth shamed and banned
Disannulled is the spell of the oath no shame for the broken troth
In Hellas the wide doth remain but heavenward its flight hath it ta en
No home of a father hast thou
For thine haven when trouble storms lower
Usurped is thy bridal bower
Of another in pride of her power
Ill starred overqueening thee now

Enter JASON

JASON

Not now first nay but ofttimes have I marked
What desperate mischief is a froward spirit
Thou mightest stay in Corinth in these halls
Bearing unfractiously thy rulers pleasure
Yet for wild whirling words banished thou art.
Me they vex not—cease never an thou wilt,
Clamouring Jason is of men most basel
But for thy railing on thy rulers count it
All gain that only exile punisheth thee
For me—I have striven long to appease the wrath

Of kings incensed fain would I thou shouldst stay
But thou rein st not thy folly speaking still
Evil of dignities art therefore banished
Yet for all this not wearied of my friends
With so much forethought come I for thee lady
That banished with thy babes thou lack not gold
Nor aught beside for exile brings with it
Hardships full many Though thou hatest me
Never can I bear malice against thee

MEDEA

Caitiff of caitiffs!—blackest of reproaches
My tongue for thine unmanliness can frame—
Com st thou to me—dost come most hateful proved
To heaven to me to all the race of men?
This is not daring no nor courage this
To wrong thy friends and blench not from their eyes,
But of all plagues infecting men the worst
Even shamelessness And yet tis well thou cam st
For I shall ease the burden of mine heart
Reviling thee and thou be galled to hear
And with the first things first will I begin
I saved thee this knows every son of Greece
That stepped with thee aboard thine Argo s hull
Thee sent to quell the flame outbreathing bulls
With yoke bands and to sow the tilth of death
The dragon warder of the Fleece of Gold
That sleepless kept it with his manifold coils
I slew and raised deliverance light for thee
Myself forsook my father and mine home
And to Iolcos under Pelion came
With thee more zealous in thy cause than wise
Pelias I slew by his own children s hands—

Of all deaths worst—and dashed their house to ruin
Thus dealt with basest of all men by me
For a new bride hast thou forsaken me
Though I had borne thee children! Wert thou childless
Not past forgiving were this marriage-craving
But faith of oaths hath vanished I know not
Whether thou deem st the olden Gods yet rule
Or that new laws are now ordained for men
For thine heart speaks thee unto me forsworn
Out on this right hand which thou oft wouldst clasp—
These knees!—I was polluted by the touch
Of a base man thus frustrate of mine hopes!
Come as a friend will I commune with thee—
Yet what fair dealing should I hope from thee?—
Yet will I questioned baser shalt thou show
Now whither turn I?—to my father s house
My land?—which I betrayed to flee with thee!
To Pelias hapless daughters? Graciously
Their father s slayer would they welcome home!
For thus it is—a foe am I become
To mine own house no quarrel I had with those
With whom I have now a death feud for thy sake
For all this hast thou made me passing blest
Midst Hella daughters! Oh in thee have I—
O wretched I!—a wondrous spouse and leal
Since from the land cast forth I pass to exile
Forlorn of friends alone with children lone
A proud reproach for our new bridegroom this—
In poverty his babes his saviour wander!
O Zeus ah wherefore hast thou given to men
Plain signs for gold which is but counterfeit
But no assay mark nature graven shows
On man s form to discern the base withal?

CHORUS

Awful and past all healing is that wrath
When they that once loved clash in feud of hate.

JASON

Needs must I be not ill at speech meseems
But like the careful helmsman of a ship
With close reefed canvas run before the gale,
Woman of thy tempestuous railing tongue
I—for thy kindness tower high thou pilest—
Deem Cypris saviour of my voyaging
Her and none other or of Gods or men
Thou art subtle of wit—nay but ungenerous
It were to tell how Love by strong compulsion
Of shafts unerring made thee save my life
Yet take I not account too strict thereof
For in that thou didst save me thou didst well
Howbeit more hast thou received than given
From my deliverance as my words shall prove —
First then in Hellas dwell st thou in the stead
Of land barbaric knowest justice learnest
To live by law without respect of force
And all the Greeks have heard thy wisdom s fame
Renown is thine but if on earth s far bourn
Thou dwelledst yet thou hadst not lived in story
Now mine be neither gold mine halls within
Nor sweeter song be mine than Orpheus sang
If my fair fortune be to fame unknown

Thus far of my great labours have I spoken —
This challenge to debate didst thou fling down —
But for thy railings on my royal marriage
Herein will I show first that wise I was

Then temperate third to thee the best of friends
And to my children—nay but hear me out

When I came hither from Iolcos-land
With many a desperate fortune in my train
What happier treasure trove could I have found
Than to wed—I an exile—with a princess?
Not—where it galls thee—loathing couch of thine,
And for a new bride smitten with desire
Nor eager I to multiply mine offspring —
Suffice these born to me no fault in them
But that—this chiefly—we might live in honour
And be not straitened —for I know full well
How all friends from the poor man stand aloof—
And I might nurture as beseems mine house
Our sons and to these born of thee beget
Brethren and knitting in one family all
Live happy days Thou what wouldst thou of children?
But me it profits, through sons to be born
To help the living Have I planned so ill?
Not thou wouldst say it save for jealousy s sting

But ye—ye women—so unreasoning are
That wedlock rights untrespassed-on all s well
But, if once your sole tenure be infringed
With the best fairest lot are ye at feud
Most bitter Would that mortals otherwise
Could get them babes, that womank nd were not,
And so no curse had lighted upon men

CHORUS

Words, Jason words tricked out full cunningly!
Yet to me—though I speak not to thy mind—
Unjust thou seem st, betraying thus thy wife.

JASON

In any wise I call the Gods to witness
That all help would I give thee and thy sons
But thy good likes thee not thy stubborn pride
Spurns friends the more thy grief shall therefore be
[*Exit*

MEDEA

Away!—impatience for the bride new trapped
Consumes thee loitering from her bower afar!
Wed for perchance—and God shall speed the word—
Thine shall be bridal thou wouldst fain renounce

CHORUS

Love bringeth nor honour nor profit to men when it cometh restra ning
Not its unscanted excess but if Cypris in measure raining
Her joy cometh down there is none other Goddess so winsome as she
Not upon me O Queen do thou aim from thy bow all golden
The arrow desire-envenomed that none may avoid—not on me!
But let Temperance shield me the fairest of gifts of the Gods ever living
Nor ever with passion of jarring contention nor feuds unforgiving
In her terrors may Love s Queen visit me, smiting with maddened unrest
For a couch mismated my soul but the peace of the bride bed be holden
In honour of her and her keen eyes choose for us bonds that be best

O fatherland O mine hom
Not mine be the exile s doom!
Into poverty s pathways hard to be trod may my feet not be guided!
Most piteous anguish were this
By death—O by death ere then may the conflict of life be decided
Ended be life s little day! To be thus from the home land divided—
No pang more bitter there is
We have seen and it needeth naught
That of others herein we be taught
For thee not a c ty for thee not a friend hath com passionated
When affliction most awful is thine
But he who regardeth not friends accursed may he perish and hated
Who opes not his heart with sincerity s key to the hapless-fated—
Never such shall be friend of mine.

Enter AEGEUS

AEGEUS

Medea joy to thee!—for fairer greeting
None knoweth to accost his friends withal.

MEDEA

Joy to thee also wise Pandion s son
Aegeus Whence art thou journeying through this land?

AEGEUS

Leaving the ancient oracle of Phoebus

JASON

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MEDEA

Why didst thou fare to earth s prophetic navel?

AEGEUS

To ask how seed of children might be mine

MEDEA

'Fore Heaven!—aye childless is thy life till now?

AEGEUS

Childless I am by chance of some God s will

MEDEA

This with a wife or knowing not the couch?

AEGEUS

Nay not unyoked to wedlock s bed am I

MEDEA

Now what to thee spake Phoebus touching issue?

AEGEUS

Deep words of wisdom not for man to interpret

MEDEA

Without sin might I know the God s reply?

AEGEUS

O yea—good sooth it asks a wise wit most.

MEDEA

What said he? Say if sin be not to hear

AEGEUS

Loose not the wine skin s forward jutting foot"—

MEDEA

Till thou shouldst do what thing or reach what land?

AEGEUS

Till to the hearth ancestral back thou come

MEDEA

And thou what wouldst thou sailing to this shore?

AEGEUS

There is one Pittheus king of Troezen he,—

MEDEA

A man most pious Pelops son they say

AEGEUS

To him the God s response I fain would tell

MEDEA

Yea—a wise man who hath much skill therein.

AEGEUS

Yea and my best beloved spear ally

MEDEA

Now prosper thou and win thine heart s desire.

AEGEUS

Why droops thine eye?—why this wan wasted hue?

MEDEA

Aegeus, of all men basest is mine husband

AEGEUS

What say'st thou? Clearly tell me thine heart's pain.

MEDEA

He wrongs me—Jason, never wronged of me

AEGEUS

What hath he done? More plainly tell it out

MEDEA

Another wife he takes his household's queen

AEGEUS

Ha! hath he dared in truth this basest deed?

MEDEA

Yea I am now dishonoured once beloved

AEGEUS

Another love was this?—or hate of thee?

MEDEA

Love?—deep and high his love is!—traitor in love!

AEGEUS

Away with him if he be base as this!

MEDEA

His love was for affinity with princes

AEGEUS

Who giveth him his daughter? Tell me all

MEDEA

Creon who ruleth this Corinthian land

AEGEUS

Sooth lady reason was that thou shouldst grieve.

MEDEA

'Tis death to me! Yes also am I banished

AEGEUS

Of whom? A monstrous wrong thou namest now!

MEDEA

Creon from Corinth driveth me an exile

AEGEUS

Doth Jason suffer this?—I count it shame!

MEDEA

In pretence no—yet O he bears it well!
But I beseech thee lo thy beard I touch —
I clasp thy knees thy suppliant am I now —
Pity O pity me the evil starred
And see me not cast forth to homelessness
Receive to a hearth place in thy land thine halls
So by heaven s blessing fruitful be thy love
In children and in death thyself be blest
Thou know st not what good fortune thou hast found
For I will end thy childlessness will cause
Thy seed to grow to sons such charms I know

AEGEUS

For many causes am I minded lady
This grace to grant thee for the God s sake first
Then for thy promise of a seed of sons
For herein Aegeus name is like to die
But thus it is—if to my land thou come
I will protect thee all I can my right
Is this but I forewarn thee of one thing—
Not from this land to lead thee I consent
But if thou reachest of thyself mine halls
Safe shalt thou bide to none will I yield thee
But from this land thou must thyself escape
For even to strangers blameless will I be

MEDEA

So be it Yet were oath pledge given for this
To me then had I all I would of thee

AEGEUS

Ha dost not trust me?—or at what dost stumble?

MEDEA

I trust thee but my foes are Pelias house
And Creon Oath bound thou couldst never yield me
To these when they would drag me from the land
Hadst thou but promised to the Gods unpledged
Thou mightest turn their friend might st lightly yield
To herald summons Strengthless is my cause
Wealth is on their side and a princely house

AEGEUS

Foresight exceeding lady in thy words!
Yet, if this be thy will I draw not back

Yea for myself is this the safest course
To have a plea to show unto thy foes
And firmer stands thy cause The Oath gods name.

MEDEA

Swear by Earth s plain and by my father s father
The Sun and join the Gods whole race thereto

AEGEUS

That I will do or not do—what? Say on

MEDEA

Never thyself to cast me forth thy land
Nor if a foe of mine would hale me thence
To yield me willingly up while thou dost live.

AEGEUS

By Earth the Sun s pure majesty and all
The Gods I swear to abide by this thou hast said.

MEDEA

Enough For broken troth what penalty?

AEGEUS

The worst that scourgeth God-despising men.

MEDEA

Pass on thy way rejoicing all is well
I too will come with all speed to thy burg
When mine intent is wrought my wish attained

[*Exit*

CHORUS

Now the Scion of Maia the Wayfarer s King
  Bring thee safe to thine home and the dream of thine heart
The sweet visions that wing thy feet mayst thou bring
To accomplishment Aegeus for now this thing
  Hath taught me how noble thou art

MEDEA

O Zeus Zeus daughter Justice Light of the Sun!
Over my foes triumphant now my friends
Shall we become our feet are on the path
Now is there hope of vengeance on my foes
For this man there where my chief weakness lay
Hath for my plots a haven in storm appeared
To him my bark s stern hawser make I fast
To Pallas burg and fortress when I go
And all my plots to thee will I tell now
Nor look I that my words should pleasure thee —
One of mine household will I send to Jason
And will entreat him to my sight to come
And soft words when he cometh will I speak
Saying Thy will is mine and It is well
Saying his royal marriage my betrayal
Is our advantage and right well devised
I will petition that my sons may stay—
Not for that I would leave on hostile soil
Children of mine for foes to trample on
But the king s daughter so by guile to slay
For I will send them bearing gifts in hand
Unto the bride that they may not be banished,
A robe fine spun a golden diadem
If she receive and don mine ornaments

Die shall she wretchedly and all who touch her
With drugs so dread will I anoint my gifts
Howbeit here I pass this story by
And wail the deed that yet for me remains
To bring to pass for I will slay my children
Yea mine no man shall pluck them from mine hand
Then having brought all Jason s house to wrack
I leave the land fleeing my dear babes blood
And having dared a deed most impious
For unendurable are mocks of foes
Let all go what is life to me? Nor country
Nor home have I nor refuge from mine ills
Then erred I in the day when I forsook
My father s halls by yon Greek s words beguiled
Who with God s help shall render me requital
For never living shall he see henceforth
The sons I bare him nor shall he beget
A son of his new bride that wretch foredoomed
In agony to die by drugs of mine
Let none account me impotent nor weak
Nor spiritless!—O nay in other sort
Grim to my foes and kindly to my friends
Most glorious is the life of such as I

CHORUS

Since thou hast made me partner of this tale—
Wishing to help thee and yet championing
The laws of men I say do thou not this!

MEDEA

It cannot be but so yet reason is
That thou say this, who art not wronged as I

CHORUS

Woman wilt have the heart to slay thy sons?

MEDEA

Yea so mine husband s heart shall most be wrung

CHORUS

But thou of wives most wretched shouldst become.

MEDEA

So be it wasted are all hindering words
But ho! [*enter* NURSE] go thou and Jason bring to me—
Thou whom I use for every deed of trust
And look thou tell none aught of mine intent,
If thine is loyal service thou a woman

[*Exeunt* MEDEA *and* NURSE

CHORUS

O happy the race in the ages olden
Of Erechtheus the seed of the blest God s line
In a land unravaged peace enfolden
Aye quaffing of Wisdom s glorious wine,
Ever through air clear shining brightly
As on wings uplifted pacing lightly
Where Harmonia they tell of the tresses golden
Bare the Pierid Muses the stainless Nine[1]

And the streams of Cephisus the lovely flowing
They tell how the Lady of Cyprus drew
And in Zephyr wafts of the winds sweet blowing
Breathed over Attica s land their dew

1 Another interpretation is equally admitted by the Greek— Grew sown by the Muses the stainless Nine

On her sons shedding Love which throned in glory
By Wisdom shapes her heroic story
And over her hair is she throwing throwing,
Roses in odorous wreaths aye new

Re-enter MEDEA

How then should the hallowed city
The city of sacred waters
Which shields with her guardian hand
All friends that would fare through her land,
Receive a murderess banned
Who had slaughtered her babes without pity
A pollution amidst of her daughters?

In thine heart's thoughts set it before thee—
To murder the fruit of thy womb!
O think what it meaneth to slay
Thy sons—what a deed this day
Thou wouldst do! By thy knees we pray
By heaven and earth we implore thee,
Deal not to thy babes such a doom!

O whence, and O whence wilt thou gain thee
Such desperate hardihood
That for spirit so fiendish shall serve
That shall strengthen thine heart that shall nerve
Thine hand that it shall not swerve
From the ruthless deed that shall stain thee
With horror of children's blood?

O how when thine eyes thou art turning
On thy little ones, wilt thou refrain
The motherhood in thee, to feel
No upwelling of tears? Canst thou steel
Thy breast when thy children kneel

To crimson thine hand with unyearning
Heart for thy darlings slain?

Enter JASON

JASON

I at thy bidding come albeit my foe,
This grace thou shalt not miss but I will hear
What new thing lady thou dost wish of me

MEDEA

Jason I ask thee to forgive the words
Late spoken Well thou mayest gently bear
With my wild mood for all the old love s sake
Now have I called myself to account and railed
Upon myself— Wretch wherefore am I mad?
And wherefore rage against good counsellors
And am at feud with rulers of the land
And with my lord who works my veriest good
Wedding a royal house to raise up brethren
Unto my sons? Shall I not cease from wrath?
What aileth me when the Gods proffer boons?
Have I not children? Know I not that we
Are exiles from our own land lacking friends?
Thus musing was I ware that I had nursed
Folly exceeding anger without cause
Now then I praise thee wise thou seem st to me
In gaining us this kinship senseless I
Who in these counsels should have been thine ally
Have furthered all have decked the bridal couch
And joyed to minister unto the bride
But we are—women needs not harsher word
Yet shouldst thou not for evil render evil
Nor pit against my folly folly of thine

I yield confessing mine unwisdom then
But unto better counsels now am come
Children my children hither leave the house

[*Enter* CHILDREN

Come forth salute your father and with me
Bid him farewell be reconciled to friends
Ye, with your mother from the hate o erpast
Truce is between us rancour hath given place
Clasp ye his right hand Woe for ambushed ills
I am haunted by the shadow of hidden things!
Ah children will ye thus through many a year
Living still reach him loving arms? Ah me
How weeping ripe am I how full of fear!
Feuds with your father ended—ah so late!—
Have filled with tears these soft relenting eyes

CHORUS

And from mine eyes start tears of pale dismay
Ah may no evil worse than this befall!

JASON

Lady I praise this mood yet blame not that
'Tis nothing strange that womankind should rage
When the spouse trafficketh in alien marriage
But now to better thoughts thine heart hath turned
And thou though late hast seen which policy
Must win a prudent woman s part is this
And for you children not unheedfully
Your sire hath ta en much forethought so help heaven.
For ye I ween in this Corinthian land
Shall with your brethren stand the foremost yet
Grow ye in strength the rest shall by your sire
And whatso God is gracious, be wrought out.

You may I see to goodly stature grown
In manhood s prime triumphant o er my foes
Thou why with wan tears thus bedew thine eyes
Turning away from them thy pallid cheek?
Why hear st thou not with gladness this my speech?

MEDEA

'Tis naught but o er these children broods mine heart

JASON

Fear not all will I order well for them

MEDEA

I will be brave—will not mistrust thy words
But woman is but woman—born for tears

JASON

Why hapless one dost thou sigh over these?

MEDEA

I bare them When thou prayedst life for them
Pity stole o er me, whispering Shall this be?
But that for which thou cam st to speech of me
In part is said to speak the rest is mine
Since the king pleaseth forth the land to send me,—
Yea for me too tis best I know it well
That I bide not a stumblingblock to thee
And the land s lords whose house s foe I seem —
Lo from this land I fare to exile forth
But, that my sons by thine hand may be reared
Entreat thou Creon that they be not banished

JASON

Prevail I may not, yet must I essay

MEDEA

Nay then thy bride bid thou to pray her sire
That thy sons be not banished from this land

JASON

Yea surely and I trow her shall I win

MEDEA

If of her sister women she is one
I too will bear a part in thine endeavour
For I will send her gifts outrivalling far
In beauty aught in these days seen I know
A robe fine spun a golden diadem
Our sons to bear them Now must an attendant
With all speed hither bring the ornaments
[*Handmaid goes*
Blessings shall hers be not one but untold
Who winneth thee for lord a peerless spouse
Who owneth ornaments which once the Sun
My father s father to his offspring gave!

Enter handmaid with casket

Take in your hands my sons these bridal gifts
And to the happy princess bride bear ye
And give—my gifts she shall not lightly esteem!

JASON

But fond one why make void thine hands of these?
Deem st thou a royal house hath lack of robes
Or gold deem st thou? Keep these and give them not
For if my wife esteems me aught my wish
Will she prefer to treasures, well I wot.

MEDEA

Nay speak not so gifts sway the Gods they say
Gold weigheth more with men than countless words
Hers fortune is God favoureth now her cause—
Young and a queen! Life would I give for ransom
Of my sons banishment not gold alone
Now children enter ye the halls of wealth
Unto your sire s new wife my lady queen
Make supplication pray ye be not exiled
And give mine ornaments—most importeth this
That she in her own hands receive my gifts
Haste ye and to your mother bring glad tidings
Of good success in that she longs to win

[*Exeunt* JASON *and* CHILDREN

CHORUS

Now for the life of the children mine hope hath been turned to despairing
No hope any more! On the slaughterward path even now are they faring!
The bride shall receive it the diadem garland that beareth enfolden
Doom for the hapless mid glittering sheen
And to set the adorning of Hades about her tresses golden
She shall take it her hands between

For its glamour of beauty its splendour unearthly shall swiftly persuade her
To bedeck her with robe and with gold wrought crown she shall soon have arrayed her
In attire as a bride in the presence of phantoms from Hades uprisen

In such dread gin shall her feet be ta en
In the weird of death shall the hapless be whelmed and from Doom s dark prison
Shall she steal forth never again

And thou wretch bridegroom accurst who art fain of a princely alliance
Blasting thou bringest—unknowing unthinking!—
Of life on thy sons and thy bride shall to foul death plight her affiance
How far from thy fortune of old art thou sinking!

And amidst my lamentings I mourn for thine anguish O hapless mother
Of children who makest thee ready to slaughter
Thy babes to avenge thee on him who would lawlessly wed with another
Would forsake thee to dwell with a prince s daughter

Enter CHILDREN S GUARDIAN *with* CHILDREN

CHILDREN S GUARDIAN

Mistress remission for thy sons of exile!
Thy gifts the princess-bride with joy received
In hand and there is peace unto thy sons
Ha!
Why dost thou stand confounded mid good hap?
Now wherefore turnest thou thy face away
And dost not hear with gladness this my speech?

MEDEA

Woe s me!

CHILDREN S GUARDIAN

This cry is to the tidings not attuned.

MEDEA

Woe yet again!

CHILDREN S GUARDIAN

Can I have brought ill hap
Unwitting—erred in deeming these glad tidings?

MEDEA

As they are are thy tidings thee I blame not

CHILDREN S GUARDIAN

Why down-drooped is thine eye? Why flow thy tears?

MEDEA

Needs must they ancient or these things the Gods
And I withal—O fool!—have ill contrived

CHILDREN S GUARDIAN

Fear not thy children yet shall bring thee home

MEDEA

Others ere then shall I send home—ah me!

CHILDREN S GUARDIAN

Not thou alone art severed from thy sons
Submissively must mortals bear mischance.

MEDEA

This will I but within the house go thou

And for my children s daily needs prepare
[*Exit* CHILDREN S GUARDIAN
O children children yours a city is
And yours a home where leaving wretched me
Ye shall abide for ever motherless!
I shall go exiled to another land
Ere I have joyed in you have seen your bliss,
Ere I have decked for you the couch the bride,
The bridal bower and held the torch on high
O me accurst in this my desperate mood!
For naught for naught my babes I nurtured you
And all for naught I laboured travail worn
Bearing sharp anguish in your hour of birth
Ah for the hopes—unhappy!—all mine hopes
Of ministering hands about mine age
Of dying folded round with loving arms
All men s desire! But now—tis past—tis past,
That sweet imagining! Forlorn of you
A bitter life and woeful shall I waste
Your mother never more with loving eyes
Shall ye behold passed to another life
Woe! woe! why gaze your eyes on me my darlings?
Why smile to me the latest smile of all?
Alas! what shall I do? Mine heart is failing
As I behold the light in my sons eyes!
Women I cannot! farewell purposes
O erpast! I take my children from the land
What need to wring their father s heart with ills
Of these to gain myself ills twice so many?
Not I not I! Ye purposes farewell!
Yet—yet—what ails me? Would I earn derision
Letting my foes slip from mine hand unpunished?
I must dare this Out on my coward mood

That let words of relenting touch mine heart!
Children pass ye within

[*Exeunt* CHILDREN

Now whoso may not
Sinless be present at my sacrifice,
On his head be it mine hand faltereth not
Oh! oh!
O heart mine heart do not—do not this deed!
Let them be wretched heart spare thou my babes!
There dwelling with me shall they gladden thee
No!—by the nether fiends that dwell with Hades
Never shall this betide that I will leave
My children for my foes to trample on!
They needs must die And since it needs must be
Even I will slay them I who gave them life
All this is utter doom —she shall not scape!
Yea on her head the wreath is in my robes
The princess bride is perishing—I know it!
But—for I fare on journey most unhappy
And shall speed these on yet unhappier—
I would speak to my sons

[*Re enter* CHILDREN

Give O my babies
Give to your mother the right hand to kiss
O dearest hand O lips most dear to me
O form and noble feature of my children
Blessing be on you—*there!*—for all things here
Your sire hath stolen Sweet O sweet embrace!
O children s roseleaf skin O balmy breath!
Away away! Strength faileth me to gaze
On you but I am overcome of evil

[*Exeunt* CHILDREN

Now now, I learn what horrors I intend

But passion overmastereth sober thought
And this is cause of direst ills to men

CHORUS

I

Full oft ere this my soul hath scaled
Lone heights of thought, empyreal steeps
Or plunged far down the darkling deeps
Where woman s feebler heart hath failed —

Yet wherefore failed? Should woman find
No inspiration thrill her breast
Nor welcome ever that sweet guest
Of Song that uttereth Wisdom s mind?

Alas! not all! Few a few are they —
Perchance amid a thousand one
Thou shouldest find —for whom the sun
Of poesy makes an inner day

II

Now this I say—calm bliss that ne er
Knew love s wild fever of the blood
The pains the joys of motherhood
Passeth all parents joy blent care

The childless they that never prove
If sunshine comes or cloud to men
With babes—far lie beyond their ken
The toils the griefs of parent love

But they whose halls with flowerets sweet
Of childhood bloom—I mark them
Care fretted travailing
To win their l ones

III

One toils with love more strong than death
  Yet—yet—who knoweth whether he
  A wise man or a fool shall be
To whom he shall his wealth bequeath?

But last but worst remains to tell
  For though ye get you wealth enow
  And though your sons to manhood grow
Fair sons and good —if Death the fell

To Hades vanishing bears down
  Your children s lives what profit is
  That Heaven hath laid with all else this
Upon mankind lone sorrow s crown?

MEDEA

Friends long have I abiding fortune s hap
Expected what from yonder shall befall
And lo a man I see of Jason s train
Hitherward coming his wild fluttering breath
Proclaimeth him the herald of strange ills
Enter MESSENGER.

MESSENGER

O thou who hast wrought an awful deed and lawless,
Flee O Medea flee nor once leave thou
The sea wain or the car that scours the plain

MEDEA

Now what hath happed that calleth for such flight?

MESSENGER

Dead is the princess even now and dead
Creon her father by thy poison drugs

MEDEA

A glorious tale thou tellest thou henceforth
Art of my benefactors and my friends

MESSENGER

What say st? Of sound mind art thou and not mad,
Who hearing of the havoc of the hearth
Of kings art glad and hast no fear for this?

MEDEA

O yea I too with words of controversy
Could answer thee —yet be not hasty friend
But tell how died they thou shouldst gladden me
Doubly if these most horribly have perished

MESSENGER

When with their father came thy children twain
And passed into the halls for marriage decked
Glad were we thralls who sorrowed for thy woes
And straightway buzzed from ear to ear the tale
Of truce to old feuds twixt thy lord and thee
One kissed the hand and one the golden head
Of those thy sons myself by joy drawn on
Followed thy children to the women s bowers
Now she which had our worship in thy stead,
Ere she beheld thy chariot yoke of sons,
Aye upon Jason turned her yearning gaze
But then before her eyes she cast her veil

Fain would he have upraised his aged frame
Yet clave as ivy clings to laurel boughs
To the filmy robes then was a ghastly wrestling
For while he strained to upraise his knee she seemed
To upwrithe and grip him if by force he haled
Torn from the very bones was his old flesh
Life s light at last quenched he gave up the ghost
Ill starred down sinking neath destruction s sea
There lie the corpses child by grey old sire
Clasped —such affliction tears not words must mourn
And of thy part no words be said by me —
Thyself from punishment wilt find escape
But man s lot now as of I count a shadow
Nor fear to say that such as seem to be
In wit most keen of men most subtle of speech
Even these pay heaviest penalty of all
For among mortals happy man is none
In fortune s flood tide might a man become
More prosperous than his neighbour happy?—no!
[*Exit*

CHORUS

Fortune meseems with many an ill this day
Doth compass Jason —yea and rightfully
But O the pity of thy calamity
Daughter of Creon who to Hades halls
Hast passed because with thee would Jason wed!

MEDEA

Friends my resolve is taken with all speed
To slay my children and to flee this land
And not to linger and to yield my sons
To death by other hands more merciless

They needs must die and since it needs must be
Even I will give them death who gave them life
Up gird thee for the fray mine heart! Why loiter
To do the dread ill deeds that must be done?
Come wretched hand of mine grasp thou the sword
Grasp!—on to the starting point of a blasted life!
Oh turn not craven!—think not on thy babes
How dear they are how thou didst bear them nay
For this short day do thou forget thy sons
Thereafter mourn them For although thou slay
Yet dear they are, and I—am wretched wretched!

[*Exit* MEDEA.

CHORUS

O Earth O all revealing splendour
Of the Sun look down on a woman accurst
Or ever she slake the murder thirst
Of a mother whose hands would smite the tender
Fruit of her womb
Look down for she sprang of thy lineage golden
Man s vengeance threatens—thy seed are holden
'Neath the shadow of doom!
But thou O heaven begotten glory
Restrain her refrain her the wretched the gory
Erinys by demons dogged we implore thee
Snatch thou from yon home!

For naught was the childbirth travail wasted
For naught didst thou bear them the near and the dear
O thou who hast fled through the Pass of Fear
From the dark blue Clashing Crags who hast hasted
Speeding thy flight!

CHORUS

Wretch thou know st not how deep thou art whelmed in woe
Jason or thou hadst uttered not such words

JASON

What now?—and is she fain to slay me too?

CHORUS

Thy sons are dead slain by the mother s hand

JASON

Ah me!—what say st thou?—thou hast killed me woman!

CHORUS

Thy children are no more so think of them

JASON

How?—slew them? Where?—within without the halls?

CHORUS (*pointing to pavement before doors*)

Open and thou shalt see thy children s corpses

JASON

Burst in the bolts with all speed serving men—
Force hinges!—let me see this twofold horror—
The dead and her—and in her blood avenge me!

MEDEA *appears above the palace roof in a chariot drawn by dragons*

MEDEA

Why shakest thou these doors and wouldst unbar
Seeking thy dead and me who wrought the deed?
Cease this essay If thou wouldst aught of me

Say what thou wilt thine hand shall touch me never
Such chariot hath my father s sire the Sun
Given me a defence from foeman s hand

JASON

O thing abhorred! O woman hatefullest
To Gods to me to all the race of men
Thou that couldst thrust the word into the babes
Thou bar st and me hast made a childless ruin!
Thus hast thou wrought yet look st thou on the sun
And earth who hast dared a deed most impious?
Now ruin seize thee!—clear I see who saw not
Then when from halls and land barbarian
To a Greek home I bare thee utter bane
Traitress to sire and land that nurtured thee!
Thy guilt s curse bolt on me the Gods have launched
For thine own brother by his heart thou slewest
Ere thou didst enter fair prowed Argo s hull
With such deeds thou begannest Wedded then
To this man and the mother of my sons
For wedlock right s sake hast thou murdered them.
There is no Grecian woman that had dared
This —yet I stooped to marry thee good sooth
Rather than these, a hateful bride and fell
A tigr ss not a woman harbouring
A fiercer nature than Tyrrhenian Scylla
But—for untold revilings would not sting
Thee in thy nature is such hardihood—
Avaunt thou miscreant stained with thy babes blood!
For me remains to wail my destiny
Who of my new wed bride shall have no joy
And to the sons whom I begat and nurtured
Living I shall not speak—lost lost to me!

To Mountain Hera s precinct bearing them
That never foe may do despite to them
Rifling their tomb This land of Sisyphus
Will I constrain with solemn festival
And rites to atone for this unhallowed murder
But I—I go unto Erechtheus land
With Aegeus to abide Pandion s son
Thou as is meet foul wretch shalt foully die,
By Argo s wreckage smitten on the skull
Who hast seen this new bridal s bitter ending

JASON

Now the Fury avenger of children smite thee
And Justice that looketh on murder requite thee!

MEDEA

What God or what spirit will heed thy request,
Caitiff forsworn who betrayest the guest?

JASON

Avaunt foul thing by whose deed thy children have died!

MEDEA

Go hence to thine halls thence lead to the grave thy bride!

JASON

I go a father forlorn of the two sons reft from his home!

MEDEA

Not yet dost thou truly mourn abide till thine old age come

JASON

O children beloved above all!

MEDEA

Of their mother beloved not of thee.

JASON

Yet she slew them!

MEDEA

That thou mightest fall in the net that
thou spreadest for me

JASON

Woe s me! I yearn with my lips to press
My sons dear lips in my wretchedness

MEDEA

Ha now art thou calling upon them now wouldst thou
kiss
Who rejectedst them then?

JASON

For the Gods sake grant me but this
The sweet soft flesh of my children to feel!

MEDEA

No—wasted in air is all thine appeal

JASON

O Zeus dost thou hear it how spurned I am?—
What courage I suffer of yonder abhorred
Child murderess yonder tigress-dam?
Yet out of mine helplessness out of my shame,
I bewail my beloved I call to record
High heaven I bid God witness the word,

That my sons thou hast slain and withholdest me
That mine hands may not touch them nor bury their clay!
Would God I had gotten them never this day
To behold them destroyed of thee!

CHORUS

All dooms be of Zeus in Olympus tis his to reveal them
Manifold things unhoped for the Gods to accomplishment bring
And the things that we looked for the Gods deign not to fulfil them
And the paths undiscerned of our eyes the Gods unseal them
So fell this marvellous thing

[*Exeunt* OMNES

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

BACCHUS
XANTHIAS *servant of Bacchus*
HERCULES
CHARON
ÆACUS
EURIPIDES
ÆSCHYLUS
PLUTO
DEAD MAN
PROSERPINE'S SERVANT MAID
TWO WOMEN SUTLERS
MUTES
CHORUS OF VOTARIES *and*
FROGS

THE ARGUMENT

Bacchus the patron of the stage in despair at the decline of the dramatic art (which had lately been deprived of its best tragic authors Sophocles and Euripides) determines to descend the infernal regions with the intention of procuring the release of Euripides He appears accordingly equipped for the expedition with the lion s skin and club (in imitation of Hercules whose success in a similar ad venture has encouraged him to the attempt) he still re tains however his usual effeminate costume which forms a contrast with these heroic attributes Xanthias his slave (like Silenus the mythologic attendant of Bacchus) is mounted upon an ass but in conformity with the practice of other human slaves when attending their mortal masters upon an earthly journey he carries a certain pole upon his shoulder at the ends of which the various packages neces sary for his master s accommodation are suspended in equilibrio The first scene (which if it had not been the first, might perhaps have been omitted) contains a censure of the gross taste of the audience (suitable to the character of Bacchus as patron of the stage) with allusions to some contemporary rival authors who submitted to court the ap plause of the vulgar by mere buffoonery—The argument between Bacchus and Xanthias at the end of this scene probably contains some temporary allusion now unknown but is obviously and in the first place a humorous exempli fication of the philosophical verbal sophisms not, in all

probability new even then but which were then for the first time introduced in Athens and which may be traced from thence to the schoolmen of the middle ages Xanthias carries the bundles *passivè* et *formaliter* the ass carries them *activè* et *materialiter*

THE FROGS

BACCHUS XANTHIAS

Xan Master shall I begin with the usual jokes
That the audience always laugh at?

Bac If you please
Any joke you please except being overburthen d
—Don t use it yet—We ve time enough before us

Xan Well something else that s comical and clever?

Bac I forbid being overpress d and overburthen d

Xan Well but the drollest joke of all—?

Bac Remember
There s one thing I protest against—

Xan What s that?

Bac Why shifting off your load to the other shoulder
And fidgeting and complaining of the gripes

Xan What then do you mean to say that I must not say
That I m ready to befoul myself?

Bac (*peremptorily*) By no means
Except when I take an emetic

Xan (*in a sullen muttering tone as if resentful of hard usage*)
What s the use, then
Of my being burthen d here with all these bundles.
If I m to be deprived of the common jokes
That Phrynichus and Lycis and Ameipsias
Allow the servants always in their comedies
Without exception when they carry bundles?

Bac Pray leave them off—for those ingenious sallies
Have such an effect upon my health and spirits
That I feel grown old and dull when I get home.
Xan (*as before or with a sort of half mutinous whine*)
It s hard for me to suffer in my limbs
To be overburthen d and debarr d from joking
Bac Well this is monstrous quite and insupportable!
Such insolence in a servant! When your master
Is going afoot and has provided you
With a beast to carry ye
Xan What! do I carry nothing?
Bac You re carried yourself
Xan But I carry bundles don t I?
Bac But the beast bears all the burdens that you carry
Xan Not those that I carry myself—tis I that carry em
Bac You re carried yourself I tell ye
Xan I can t explain it
But I feel it in my shoulders plainly enough
Bac Well if the beast don t help you take and try
Change places with the ass and carry him
Xan (*in a tone of mere disgust*)
Oh dear! I wish I had gone for a volunteer
And left you to yourself I wish I had
Bac Dismount you rascal! Here we re at the house
Where Hercules lives—Holloh! there! who s within there?

[*Bacchus kicks outrageously at the door*

HERCULES BACCHUS XANTHIAS

Her Who s there? (He has bang d at the door whoever he is
With the kick of a centaur) What s the matter there?
Bac (*aside*) Ha! Xanthias!

Xan What?

Bac (*aside*) Did ye mind how he was frighten d?

Xan I suppose he was afraid you were going mad

Her (*aside*) By Jove! I shall laugh outright I m ready to burst
I shall laugh in spite of myself upon my life

[*Hercules shifts about and turns aside to disguise his laughter this apparent shyness confirms Bacchus in the opinion of his own ascendancy which he manifests accordingly*

Bac (*with a tone of protection*)
Come hither friend —What ails ye? Step this way
I want to speak to ye

Her (*with a good humoured but unsuccessful endeavour to suppress laughter or to conceal it Suppose him for instance speaking with his hand before his mouth*)
But I can t help laughing
To see the lion s skin with a saffron rob
And the club with the women s sandals—altogether—
What s the meaning of it all? Have you been abroad?

Bac I ve been abroad—in the Fleet—with Cleisthenes

Her (*sharply and ironically*) You fought—?

Bac (*briskly and sillily*) Yes that we did—we gain d victory
And we sunk the enemies ships—thirteen of em

Her So you woke at last and found it was a dream?"

Bac But aboard the fleet as I pursued my studies,
I read the tragedy of Andromeda
And then such a vehement passion struck my heart,
You can t imagine

Her A small one I suppose,
My little fellow—a moderate little passion?

Bac (*ironically the irony of imbecility*)

It s just as small as Molon is—that s all—
Molon the wrestler I mean—as small as he is—

Her Well what was it like? what kind of a thing? what was it?

Bac (*meaning to be very serious and interesting*)
No friend you must not laugh it s past a joke
It s quite a serious feeling—quite distressing
I suffer from it—

Her (*bluntly*) Well explain What was it?

Bac I can t declare it at once but I ll explain it
Theatrically and enigmatically

[*With a buffoonish assumption of tragic gesture and emphasis*

Were you ever seized with a sudden passionate longing
For a mess of porridge?

Her Often enough if that s all

Bac Shall I state the matter to you plainly at once
Or put it circumlocutorily?

Her Not about the porridge I understand your instance

Bac Such is the passion that possesses me
For poor Euripides that s dead and gone
And it s all in vain people trying to persuade me
From going after him

Her What to the shades below?

Bac Yes to the shades below or the shades beneath em
To the undermost shades of all I m quite determined

Her But what s your object?

Bac (*with a ridiculous imitation of tragical action and emphasis*)
Why my object is
That I want a clever poet— for the good
The gracious and the good are dead and gone
The worthless and the weak are left alive

Her Is not Iophon a good one?—He s alive sure?
Bac If he s a good one he s our only good one
But it s a question I m in doubt about him
Her There s Sophocles he s older than Euripides—
If you go so far for em you d best bring him
Bac No first I ll try what Iophon can do
Without his father Sophocles to as ist him
—Besides, Euripides is a clever rascal
A sharp contriving rogue that will make a shift
To desert and steal away with me the other
Is an easy minded soul and always was
Her Where s Agathon?
Bac He s gone and left me too
Regretted by his friends a worthy poet—
Her Gone! Where poor soul?
Bac To the banque s of the blest!
Her But then you ve Xenocles—
Bac Yes! a plague upon him
Her Pythangelus too—
Xan But nobody thinks of me
Standing all this while with the bundles on my shoulder
Her But have not you oth r young ingenious youths
That are fit to out-talk Euripides ten times over
To the amount of a thousand at least all writing tragedy—?
Bac They re good for nothing— Warblers of the Grove"—
—"Little, foolish fluttering things"—poor puny wre ches,
That dawdle and dangle about with the tragic muse
Incapable of any serious meaning—
—There s not one hearty poet amongst them all
That s fit to risk an adventurous valiant phrase
Her How— hearty?" What do you mean by "valiant phrases?"

Bac (*the puzzle of a person who is called upon for a definition*)
I mean a kind of a doubtful bold expression
To talk about *The viewless foot of Time* —
[*Tragic emphasis in the quotations*
And *Jupiter s Secret Chamber in the Skies* —
And about A person s soul not being perjured
When the tongue forswears itself in spite of the soul

Her Do you like that kind of stuff?

Bac I m crazy after it

Her Why sure it s trash and rubbish—Don t you think so?

Bac Men s fancies are their own—Let mine alone"—

Her But in fact, it seems to me quite bad—rank nonsense

Bac You ll tell me next what I ought to like for supper

Xan But nobody thinks of me here with the bundles

Bac (*with a careless easy voluble degage style*)
—But now to the business that I came upon—
[*Upon a footing of equality—The tone of a person who is dispatching business off hand with readiness and unconcern*
(With the apparel that you see—the same as yours)
To obtain a direction from you to your friends
(To apply to them—in case of anything—
If anything should occur) the acquaintances
That received you there—(the time you went before
—For the business about Cerberus)—if you d give me
Their names and their directions and communicate
Any information relative to the country
The roads—the streets—the bridges, and the brothels,
The wharfs—the public walks,—the public houses
The fountains,—aqueducts—and inns and taverns

And lodgings—free from bugs and fleas if possible
If you know any such—

Xan But nobody thinks of me

Her What a notion! You! will you risk it? are you mad?

Bac (*meaning to be very serious and manly*)
I beseech you say no more—no more of that,
But inform me briefly and plainly about my journey
The shortest road and the most convenient one

Her (*with a tone of easy indolent deliberate banter*)
Well—which sha l I tell ye first now?—Let me see now—
There s a good convenient road by the Rope and Noose
The Hanging Road

Bac No that s too close and stifling

Her Then there s an easy fair well beaten track
As you go by the Pestle and Mortar—

Bac What the Hemlock?

Her To be sure—

Bac That s much too cold—it will never do
They tell me it strikes a chill to the legs and feet

Her Should you like a speedy rapid downhill road?

Bac Indeed I should for I m a sorry traveller

Her Go to the Keramicus then

Bac What then?

Her Get up to the very top of the tower

Bac What then?

Her Stand there and watch when the Race of the Torch begins
And mind when you hear the people cry *Start! start!*
Then start at once with em

Bac Me? Start? Where from?

Her From the top of the tower to the bottom

Bac No not

It s enough to dash my brains out! I ll not go
Such a road upon any account

Her Well which way then?

Bac The way you went yourself

Her But it s a long one
For first you come to a monstrous bottomless lake

Bac And what must I do to pass?

Her You ll find a boat there
A little tiny boat as big as that
And an old man that ferries you over in it
Receiving twopence as the usual fee

Bac Ah! that same twopence governs everything
Wherever it goes—I wonder how it managed
To find its way there?

Her Theseus introduced it
—Next you ll meet serpents and wild beasts and mon sters
[*Suddenly and with a shout in Bacchus's ear*
Horrific to behold!

Bac (*starting a little*) Don t try to fright me
You ll not succeed I promise you—I m determined

Her Then there s an abyss of mire and floating filth
In which the damn d lie wallowing and overwhelm d
The unjust the cruel and the inhospitable
And the barbarous bilking Cullies that withhold
The price of intercourse with fraud and wrong
The incestuous and the parricides and the robbers
The perjurers and assassins and the wretches
That wilfully and presumptuously transcribe
Extracts and trash from Morsimus s plays

Bac And by Jove! Cinesias with his Pyrrhic dancers
Ought to be there—they re worse or quite as bad

Her But after this your sense will be saluted

With a gentle breathing ound of flutes and voices
And a beautiful spreading light like ours on earth
And myrtl glades and happy quires among
Of women and men with rapid applause and mirth

Bac And who are all those folks?

Her The initiated

Xan (*gives indications of restiveness as if ready to throw down his bundles*)
I won t stand here like a mule in a procession
Any longer with these packages and bundles

Her (*hastily in a civil hurry as when yo i shake a man by the hand and shove him out of the room and give him your best wishes and advice all at once*)
They ll tell you everything you want to know
For they re established close upon the road
By the corner of Pluto s house—so fare you well
Farewell my little fellow [*Exit*

Bac (*pettishly*) I wish you better
(*to Xanthias*) You sirrah take your bundles up again

Xan What before I put them down?

Bac Yes! now this moment.

Xan Nah! don t insist there s plenty of people going
As corpses with the convenience of a carriage
They d take it for a trifle gladly enough

Bac But if we meet with nobody?

Xan Then I ll take em

Bac Come come that s fairly spoken and in good time
For there they re carrying a corpse out to be buried

[*A funeral with a corpse on an open bier crosses the stage*

—Holloh! you there—you Deadman—can t you hear?
Would you take any bundles to hell with ye, my good fellow?

Deadman What are they?
Bac These
Deadman Then I must have two drachmas
Bac I can t—you must take less
Deadman (peremptorily) Bearers move on
Bac No stop! we shall settle between us—you re so hasty
Deadman It s no use arguing I must have two drachmas
Bac (emphatically and significantly) Ninepence!
Deadman I d best be alive again at that rate [*Exit*
Bac Fine airs the fellow gives himself—a rascal!
I ll have him punish d I vow for overcharging
Xan Best give him a good beating give me the bundles
I ll carry em
Bac You re a good true hearted fellow
And a willing servant —Let s move on to the ferry

CHARON BACCHUS XANTHIAS

Char Hoy! Bear a hand there—Heave ashore
Bac What s this?
Xan The lake it is—the place he told us of
By Jove! and there s the boat—and here s old Charon
Bac Well Charon! — Welcome Charon! — Welcome kindly!
Char Who wants the ferryman? Anybody waiting
To remove from the sorrows of life? A passage anybody?
To Lethe s wharf?—to Cerberus s Reach?
To Tartarus?—to Tænarus?—to Perdition?
Bac Yes I
Char Get in then
Bac (hesitatingly) Tell me wh re are you going?
To Perdition really—?
Char (not sarcastically but civilly in the way of business)
Yes to oblige you I will

With all my heart—Step in there.

Bac Have a care!
Take care, good Charon!—Charon have a care!

[*Bacchus gets into the boat*

Come, Xanthias, come!

Char I take no slaves aboard
Except they ve volunteer d for the naval victory

Xan I could not—I was suffering with sore eyes

Char You must trudge away then round by the end of the lake there

Xan And whereabouts shall I wait?

Char At the Stone of Repentance,
By the Slough of Despond beyond the Tribulations
You understand me?

Xan Yes I understand you
A lucky promising direction truly

Char (*to Bac*) Sit down at the oar—Come quick if there s more coming!
(*To Bac again*) Holloh! what s that you re doing?

[*Bacchus is seated in a buffoonish attitude on the side of the boat where the oar was fastened*

Bac What you told me
I m sitting at the oar

Char Sit there, I tell you
You Fatguts that s your place

Bac (*changes his place*) Well so I do

Char Now ply your hands and arms

Bac (*makes a silly motion with his arms*) Well so I do

Char You d best leave off your fooling Take to the oar
And pull away

Bac But how shall I contrive?
I ve never served on board—I m only a landsman
I m quite unused to it—

Char We can manage it
As soon as you begin you shall have some music
That will teach you to keep time
Bac What music s that?
Char A chorus of Frogs—uncommon musical Frogs
Bac Well give me the word and the time
Char Whooh up up whooh up up

CHORUS

Brekekekex koax koax
Shall the Choral Quiristers of the Marsh
Be censured and rejected as hoarse and harsh
And their Chromatic essays
Deprived of praise?
No let us raise afresh
Our obstreperous Brekekekex
The customary croak and cry
Of the creatures
At the theatres
In their yearly revelry
Brekekekex koax koax
Bac (*rowing in great misery*)
How I m maul d
How I m gall d
Worn and mangled to a mash—
There they go! *Koax koax!* —
Frogs Brekekekex koax koax
Bac Oh beshrew
All your crew
You don t consider how I smart
Frogs Now for a sample of the Art!
Brekekekex koax koax
Bac I wish you hang d with all my heart

—Have you nothing else to say?
Brekekekex koax koax all day!

Frogs We've a right
We've a right
And we croak at ye for spite.
We've a right
We've a right
Day and night
Day and night
Night and day
Still to Creak and croak away
Phœbus and every Grace
Admire and approve of the croaking race
And the egregious guttural notes
That are gargled and warbled in their lyrical throats
In reproof
Of your scorn
Mighty Pan
Nods his horn
Beating time
To the rhyme
With his hoof
With his hoof
Persisting in our plan
We proceed as we began
Brekekekex brekekekex
Kooax Kooax

Bac Oh the Frogs consume and rot em
I've a blister on my bottom
Hold your tongues you tuneful creatures

Frogs Cease with your profane entreaties
All in vain for ever striving
Silence is against our natures.

With the vernal heat reviving
  Our acquatic crew repair
From their periodic sleep
In the dark and chilly deep
To the cheerful upper air
Then we frolic here and there
All amidst the meadows fair
Shady plants of asphodel
Are the lodges where we dwell
Chaunting in the leafy bowers
All the livelong summer hours
Till the sudden gusty showers
Send us headlong helter skelter
To the pool to seek for shelter
Meagre eager leaping lunging
From the sedgy wharfage plunging
To the tranquil depth below
There we muster all a row
Where secure from toil and trouble,
With a tuneful hubble bubble
Our symphonious accents flow
Brekekekex koax koax

Bac I forbid you to proceed

Frogs That would be severe indeed
Arbitrary bold and rash—
Brekekekex koax koax

Bac I command you to desist—
—Oh my back there! oh my wrist!
What a *twist!*
What a sprain!

Frogs Once again—
We renew the tuneful strain
Brekekekex koax koax

Bac I disdain—(Hang the pain!)
All your nonsense noise and trash
Oh my blister! Oh my sprain!
Frogs Brekekekex koax koax
Friends and Frogs we must display
All our powers of voice to-day
Suffer not this stranger here,
With fastidious foreign ear
To confound us and abash
Brekekekex koax koax
Bac Well *my spirit is not* broke
If it s only for the joke
I ll outdo you with a croak
Here it goes—(*very loud*) Koax koax"
Frogs Now for a glorious croaking crash [*Still louder* –
Brekekekex koax koax
Bac (*splashing with his oar*)
I ll disperse you with a splash
Frogs Brekekekex koax koax
Bac I ll subdue
Your rebellious noisy crew—
—Have amongst you there slap-dash
[*Strikes at them*
Frogs Brekekekex koax koax
We defy your oar and you
Char Hold! We re ashore just—shift your oar Get out
—Now pay for your fare
Bac There—there it is—the twopence.

CHARON *returns* BACCHUS *finding himself alone and in a strange place begins to call out*

Bac Hoh Xanthias! Xanthias, I say! Where s Xanthias?
Xan A hoy!

Bac Come here

Xan I m glad to see you master

Bac *What s that before us there?*

Xan The mire and darkness

Bac Do you see the villains and the perjurers
That he told us of?

Xan Yes plain enough don t you?

Bac Ah! now I see them indeed quite plain—and now too [*Turning to the audience*
Well what shall we do next?

Xan We d best move forward
For here s the place that Hercules there inform d us
Was haunted by those monsters

Bac Oh confound him!
He vapour d and talk d at random to deter me
From venturing He s amazingly conceited
And jealous of other people is Hercules
He *reckon d I should rival him and in fact*
(Since I ve come here so far) I should rather like
To meet with an adventure in some shape

Xan By Jove! and I think I hear a kind of a noise

Bac Where? where?

Xan There just behind us

Bac Go behind then

Xan There!—it s before us now —There!

Bac Go before then

Xan Ah! now I see it—a monstrous beast indeed!

Bac What kind?

Xan A dreadful kind—all kinds at once
It changes and transforms itself about
To a mule and an ox —and now to a beautiful creature
A woman!

Bac Where? where is she? Let me seize her

Xan But now she s turned to a mastiff all of a sudden
Bac It s the Weird hag! the Vampyre!
Xan (*collectedly*) Like enough
She s all of a blaze of fire about the mouth
Bac (*with great trepidation*)
Has she got the brazen foot?
Xan (*with cool despair*) Yes there it is—
By Jove!—and the cloven hoof to the other leg
Distinct enough—that s she!
Bac But what shall I do?
Xan And I too?

[*Bacchus runs to the front of the stage where there was a seat of honour appropriated to the priest of Bacchus*

Bac Save me Priest protect and save me
That we may drink nd b jolly together hereafter
Xan We re ruin d Master Hercul s
Bac Don t call me so I beg
Don t mention my name good friend upon any account.
Xan Well Bacchus then!
Bac That s worse ten thousand times

[*Bacchus remains hiding his face before the seat of the priest—in the meantime affairs take a more favourable turn*

Xan (*cheerfully*) Come master move along—Come, come this way
Bac (*without looking round*)
What s happened?
Xan Why we re prosperous and victorious
The storm of fear nd danger has subsided
And (as the actor said the other day)
"Has only left a gentle *qualm* behind
The Vampyre s vanish d

Bac Has she? upon your oath?
Xan By Jove! she has
Bac No swear again
Xan By Jove!
Bac Is she by Jupiter?
Xan By Jupiter!
Bac Oh dear what a fright I was in with the very sight of her
It turn d me sick and pale—but see the priest here!
He has colour d up quite with the same alarm
—What has brought me to this pass?—It must be Jupiter
With his *Chamber in the Skies* and the *Foot of Time*
[*A flute sounds Bacchus remains absorbed and inattentive to the objects about him*
Xan Holloh you!
Bac What?
Xan Why did you not hear?
Bac Why what?
Xan The sound of a flute
Bac (*recollecting himself*) Indeed! And there s a smell too
A pretty mystical ceremonious smell
Of torches We ll watch here and keep quite quiet

Chorus of Votaries Bacchus Xanthias

Chorus—*Shouting and Singing*

Iacchus! Iacchus! Ho!
Iacchus! Iacchus! Ho!

Xan *There Master there they are the initiated*
All sporting about as he told us we should find em.
They re singing in praise of Bacchus like Diagoras
Bac Indeed and so they are but we ll keep quiet
Till we make them out a little more distinctly

CHORUS —*Song*

Mighty Bacchus! Holy Power!
Hither at the wonted hour
Come away
Come away
With the wanton holiday
Where the revel uproar leads
To the mystic holy meads
Where the frolic votaries fly
With a tipsy shout and cry
Flourishing the Thyrsus high
Flinging forth alert and airy
To the sacred old vagary
The tumultuous dan e and song
Sacred from the vulgar throng
Mystic orgies that are known
To the votaries alone—
To the mystic chorus solely—
Secret—unreveal d—and holy

Xan Oh glorious virgin daughter of the goddess!
What a scent of roasted griskin reach d my senses

Bac Keep quiet—and watch for a chance of a piece of the haslets

CHORUS —*Song*

Raise the fiery torches high!
Bacchus is approaching nigh
Like the planet of the morn
Breaking with the hoary dawn
On the dark solemnity—
There they flash upon the sight
All the plain is blazing bright
Flush d and overflown with light

Age has cast his years away
And the cares of many a day
Sporting to the lively lay—
Mighty Bacchus! march and lead
(Torch in hand toward the mead)
Thy devoted humble Chorus
Mighty Bacchus—move before us!

SEMICHORUS

Keep silence—keep peace—and let all the profane
From our holy olemnity duly refrain
Whose souls unenlightened by taste are obscure
Whose poetical notions are dark and impure
  Whose theatrical conscience
  Is sullied by nonsense
Who never were train d by the mighty Cratinus
In mystical orgies poetic and vinous
Who delight in buffooning and je ts out of season
Who promote the designs of oppression and treason
Who foster sedition and strife and debate
All traitors in short to the stage and the state
Who surrender a fort or in private export
To places and harbours of hostile resort
Clandestine consignments of cables and pitch
In the way that Thorycion grew to be rich
From a scoundrelly dirty collector of tribute
All such we reject and severely prohibit
All statesmen retrenching the fees and the salaries
Of theatrical bards in revenge for the railleries
And jests and lampoons of this holy solemnity
Profanely pursuing their personal enmity
For having been flouted and scoff d and scorn d
All such are admonish d and heartily warn d

We warn them once,
We warn them twice
We warn and admonish—we warn them thrice,
To conform to the law
To retire and withdraw
While the Chorus again with the formal saw
(Fixt and assign d to the festive day)
Move to the measure and march away

SEMICHORUS

March! march! lead forth
Lead forth manfully
March in order all
Bustling hustling jostling
As it may befall
Flocking shouting laughing
Mocking flouting quaffing
One and all
All have had a belly full
Of breakfast brave and plentiful
Therefore
Evermore
With your voices and your bodies
Serve the goddess
And raise
Songs of praise
She shall save the country still
And save it against the traitor s will
So she says

SEMICHORUS

Now let us raise, in a different strain
The praise of the goddess to giver of grain

Imploring her favour
With other behaviour
In measures more sober submissive and graver

SEMICHORUS

Ceres holy patroness
Condescend to mark and bless
With benevolent regard
Both the Chorus and the Bard
Grant them for the present day
Many things to sing and say
Follies intermix d with sense
Folly but without offence
Grant them with the present play
To bear the prize of verse away

SEMICHORUS

Now call again and with a different measure,
The power of mirth and pleasure
The florid active Bacchus bright and gay
To journey forth and join us on the way

SEMICHORUS

O Bacchus attend! the customary patron
Of every lively lay
Go forth without delay
Thy wonted annual way
To meet the ceremonious holy matron
Her grave procession gracing
Thine airy footsteps tracing
With unlaborious light celestial motion
And here at thy devotion

Behold thy faithful quire
In pitiful attire
All overworn and ragged
This jerkin old and jagged
These buskins torn and burst
Though sufferers in the fray
May serve us at the worst
To sport throughout the day
And there within the shades
I spy some lovely maids
With whom we romp d and revell d
Dismantled and dishevell d
With their bosoms open
With whom we might be coping

Xan Well I was always hearty
Disposed to mirth and ease
I m ready to join the party

Bac (*with a tone of imbecility like Sir Andrew Ague cheek s Yes and I too — Ay or I either*)
And I will if you please

Bacchus (*to the* Chorus)

Prithee my good fellows,
Would you please to tell us
Which is Pluto s door
I m an utter stranger
Never here before

Chorus

Friend you re out of danger
You need not seek it far
There it stands before ye,
Before ye, where you are.

Bac Take up your bundles Xanthias

Xan Hang all bundles
A bundle has no end and these have none

[*Exeunt Bacchus and Xanthias*

SEMICHORUS

Now we go to dance and sing
In the consecrated shades
Round the secret holy ring
With the matrons and the maids
Thither I must haste to bring
The mysterious early light
Which must witness every rite
Of the joyous happy night

SEMICHORUS

Let us hasten—let us fly—
Where the lovely meadows lie
Where the living waters flow
Where the roses bloom and blow
—Heirs of Immortality
Segregated safe and pure
Easy sorrowle s secure
Since our earthly course is run
We behold a brighter sun
Holy lives—a holy vow—
Such rewards await them now

Scene The Gate of Pluto s Palace

Enter BACCHUS *and* XANTHIAS

Bac (*going up to the door with considerable hesitation*)
Well how must I knock at the door now? Can t ye tell me?

How do the native inhabitants knock at doors?

Xan Pah don t stand fooling there but smite it smartly
With the very spirit and air of Hercules

Bac Holloh!

Æacus (from within with the voice of a royal and infernal porter)
Who s there?

Bac (with a forced voice) 'Tis I the valiant Hercules!

Æacus (coming out)
Thou brutal abominable detestable
Vile, villainous infamous nefarious scoundrel!
—How durst thou villain as thou wert to seize
Our watch-dog Cerberus whom I kept and tended
Hurrying him off half strangled in your grasp?
—But now be sure we have you safe and fast
Miscreant and villain!—Thee the Stygian cliffs
With stern adamantine durance and the rocks
Of inaccessible Acheron red with gore
Environ and beleaguer and the watch
And swift pursuit of the hideous hounds of hell
And the horrible Hydra with her hundred heads
Whose furious ravening fangs shall rend and tear thee
Wrenching thy vitals forth with the heart and midriff
While inexpressible Tartesian monsters
And grim Tithrasian Gorgons toss and scatter
With clattering claws thine intertwined intestines
To them with instant summons, I repair
Moving in hasty march with steps of speed

[*Æacus departs with a tremendous tragical exit and Bacchus falls to the ground in a fright*

Xan Holloh you! What s the matter there—?

Bac Oh dear
I ve had an accident.

Xan Poh! poh! jump up!
Come! you ridiculous simpleton! don t lie there
The people will see you
Bac Indeed I m sick at heart lah!
(Here a few lines are omitted)
Xan Was there ever in heaven or earth such a coward?
Bac Me?
A coward! Did not I show my presence of mind—
And call for a sponge and water in a moment?
Would a coward have done that?
Xan What else would he do?
Bac He d have lain there stinking like a nasty coward
But I jump d up at once like a lusty wrestler
And look d about and wiped myself withal
Xan Most manfully done!
Bac By Jove and I think it was
But tell me wer n t you frighten d with that speech?
—Such horrible expressions!
Xan *(coolly but with conscious and intentional coolness)*
No not I
I took no notice—
Bac Well I ll tell you what,
Since you re such a valiant spirited kind of fellow
Do you be *Me*—with the club and the lion skin
Now you re in this courageous temper of mind
And I ll go take my turn and carry the bundles
Xan Well—give us hold—I must humour you forsooth
Make haste *(he changes his dress)* and now behold the
Xanthian Hercules
And mind if I don t display more heart and spirit
Bac Indeed and you look the character completely
Like that heroic Melitensian hangdog—
Come, now for my bundles I must mind my bundles

Enter PROSERPINE'S SERVANT MAID (*a kind of Dame Quickly*) *who immediately addresses* XANTHIAS

Dear Hercules Well you re come at last Come in
For the goddess as soon as she heard of it set to work
Baking peck loaves and frying stacks of pancakes
And making messes of furmety there s an ox
Besides she has roasted whole, with a relishing stuffing
If you'll only just step in this way

Xan (*with dignity and reserve*) I thank you
I m equally obliged

Ser Maid No no by Jupiter!
We must not let you off indeed There s wild fowl
And sweetmeats for the dessert, and the best of wine
Only walk in

Xan (*as before*) I thank you You ll excuse me

Ser Maid No no we can t excuse you indeed we can t
There are dancing and singing girls besides

Xan (*with di sembled emotion*) What! dancers?

Ser Maid Yes that there are the sweetest charmingest things
That you ever saw—and there s the cook this moment
Is dishing up the dinner

Xan (*with an air of lofty condescension*) Go before then,
And tell the girls—those singing girls you mentioned—
To prepare for my approach in person presently
(*To Bacchus*) You sirrah! follow behind me with the bundles

Bac Holloh you! what do you take the thing in earnest,
Because, for a joke I drest you up like Hercules?
[*Xanthias ontinues to gesticulate as Hercules*
Come don t stand fooling Xanthias You ll provoke me.
There, carry the bundles, Sirrah when I bid you.

Xan (relapsing at once into his natural air)
Why sure? do you mean to take the things away
That you gave me yourself of your own accord this instant?

Bac I never mean a thing I do it at once
Let go of the lion s skin directly I tell you

Xan (resigning his heroical insignia with a tragical air and tone)
To you just Gods I make my last appeal
Bear witness!

Bac What! the Gods?—do you think they mind you?
How ould you take it in your head I wonder
Such a foolish fancy for a fellow like you
A mortal and a slave to pass for Hercules?

Xan There Take them —There—you may have them—but please God
You may come to want my help some time or other

Chorus

Dexterous and wily wits
Find their own advantage ever
For the wind where er it sits
Leaves a berth secure and clever
To the ready navigator
That foresees and knows the nature,
Of the wind can turn and shift
To the sheltered easy side
'Tis a practice proved and tried
Not to wear a formal face
Fixt in attitude and place
Like an image on its base
Tis the custom of the seas
Which as all the world agrees
Justifies Theramenes

BACCHUS

How ridiculous and strange
What a monstrous proposition
That I should condescend to change
My dress my name, and my condition,
To follow Xanthias and behave
Like a mortal and a slave
To be set to watch the door
While he wallow'd with his whore,
Tumbling on a purple bed
While I waited with submission
To receive a broken head
Or be kick d upon suspicion
Of impertinence and peeping
At the joys that he was reaping

Enter Two WOMEN *Sutlers or Keepers of an Eating House*

1st Woman What Platana! Goody Platana! there! that he
The fellow that robs and cheats poor victuallers
That came to our house and eat those nineteen loaves

2nd Woman Ay sure enough that s he the very man

Xan (*tauntingly to Bacchus*) There s mischief in the wind for somebody!

1st Woman —And a dozen and a half of cutlets and fried chops,
At a penny halfpenny a piece—

Xan (*significantly*) There are pains and penalties
Impending—

1st Woman —And all the garlic such a quantity
As he swallowed—

Bac (*delivers this speech with Herculean dignity afte

fashion having hitherto remained silent upon the same principle)

Woman you re beside yourself
You talk you know not what—

2nd Woman No no! you reckoned
I should not know you again with them there buskins

1st Woman —Good lack! and there was all that fish besides
Indeed—with the pickle and all—and the good green cheese
That he gorged at once with the rind and the rush baskets
And then when I called for payment he looked fierce
And stared at me in the face and grinned and roared—

Xan Just like him! That s the way wherever he goes

1st Woman —And snatched his sword out and behaved like mad

Xan Poor souls! you suffered sadly!

1st Woman Yes indeed
And then we both ran off with the fright and terror
And scrambled into the loft beneath the roof
And he took up two rugs and stole them off

Xan Just like him again—but something must be done
Go call me Cleon he s my advocate

2nd Woman And Hyperbolus if you meet him send him here
He s mine and we ll demolish him I warrant

1st Woman (going close up to Bacchus in the true termagant attitude of rage and defiance with the arms akimbo and a neck and chin thrust out)
How I should like to strike those ugly teeth out
With a good big stone you ravenous greedy villain!
You gormandising villain! that I should—
Yes that I should your wicked ugly fangs

That have eaten up my substance and devoured me.
Bac And I could toss you into the public pit
With the malefactors carcasses that I could
With pleasure and satisfaction that I could
1st Woman And I should like to rip that gullet out
With a reaping hook that swallowed all my tripe,
And liver and lights—but I ll fetch Cleon here
And he shall summon him He shall settle him
And have it out of him this very day
[*Exeunt 1st and 2nd Woman*
Bac (*in a pretended soliloquy*)
I love poor Xanthias dearly that I do
I wish I might be hanged else
Xan Yes I know—
I know your meaning—No no more of that
I won t act Hercules—
Bac Now pray don t say so
My little Xanthias
Xan How should I be Hercules?
A mortal and a slave a fellow like me?—
Bac I know you re angry and you ve a right to be angry
And if you beat me for it I d not complain
But if ever I strip you again from this time forward,
I wish I may be utterly confounded
With my wife my children and my family
And the blear-eyed Archedemus into th bargain
Xan I agree then on that oath and those conditions
[*Xanthias equips himself with the club and lion s skin and Bacchus resumes his bundles*

CHORUS (*addressing* XANTHIAS)

Now that you revive and flourish
In your old attire again

You must rouse afresh and nourish
  Thoughts of an heroic strain
That exalt and raise the figure
And assume a fire and vigour
And an attitude and air
Suited to the garb you wear
With a brow severely bent
Like the god you represent
    But beware
    Have a care!
If you blunder or betray
Any weakness any way
Weakness of the heart or brain
We shall see you once again
Trudging in the former track
With the bundles at your back

XANTHIAS (*in reply to the* CHORUS)

Friends I thank you for your care
Your advice was good and fair
Corresponding in its tone
With reflections of my own
—Though I clearly comprehend
All the upshot and the end
(That if any good comes of it
Any pleasure any profit—
He my master will recede
From the terms that were agreed)
You shall see me notwithstanding
Stern intrepid and commanding
Now s the time For there s a noise!
Now for figure look and voice!

ÆACUS *enters again as a vulgar executioner of the law with suitable understrappers in attendance*

Æacus Arrest me there that fellow that stole the dog
There!—Pinion him!—Quick!

Bac (*tauntingly to Xanthias*) There s somebody in a scrape

Xan (*in a menacing attitude*) Keep off and be hanged

Æacus Oh hoh! do you mean to fight for it?
Here! Pardokas and Skeblias and the rest of ye
Make up to the rogue and settle him Come be quick

[*A scuffle ensues in which Xanthias succeeds in obliging Æacus s runners to keep their distance*

Bac (*mortified at Xanthias s prowess*)
Well is not this quite monstrous and outrageous
To steal the dog and then to make an assault
In justification of it

Xan (*triumphantly and ironically*) Quite outrageous!

Æacus (*gravely and dissembling his mortification*)
An aggravated case!

Xan (*with candour and gallantry*) Well now—by Jupiter,
May I die but I never saw this place before—
Nor ever stole the amount of a farthing from you
Nor a hair of your dog s tail—But you shall see now
I ll settle all this business nobly and fairly
—This slave of mine—you may take and torture him
And if you make out anything against me
You may take and put me to death for aught I care

Æacus (*in an obliging tone softened into deference and civility by the liberality of Xanthias s proposal*)
But which way would you plea e to have him tortured?

Xan (*with a gentlemanly spirit of accommodation*)
In your own way—with the lash—with knots and screws

With the common usual customary tortures
With the rack—with the water torture—anyway-
With fire and vinegar—all sorts of ways
(*After a very slight pause*) There s only one thing should warn you of
I must not have him treated like a child
To be whipt with fennel or with lettuce leaves

Æacus That s fair—and if so be he s maim d or crippled
In any respect—the valy shall be paid you

Xan Oh no!—by no means! not to me!—by no means!
You must not mention it!—Take him to the torture

Æacus It had better be here and under your own eye
(*To Bacchus*) Come you—put down your bundles and make ready
And mind—Let me hear no lies

Bac *I ll tell you what*
I d advise people not to torture me
I give you notice—I m a deity
So mind now—you ll have nobody to blame
But your own self—

Æacus What s that you re saying there?

Bac Why that I m Bacchus Jupiter s own son
That fellow there s a slave [*Pointing to Xanthias*

Æacus (*to Xanthias*) Do ye hear?

Xan I hear him—
A reason the more to give him a good beating
If he s immortal he need never mind it

Bac Why should not you be beat as well as I then
If you re immortal as you say you are?

Xan Agreed—and him the first that you see flinching
Or seeming to mind it at all you may set him down
For an impostor and no real deity

Æacus (to Xanthias with warmth and cordiality)
Ah you re a worthy gentleman I ll be bound for t
You re all for the truth and the proof Come—Strip there both o ye

Xan But how can ye put us to the question fairly
Upon equal terms?

Æacus (in the tone of a person proposing a convenient agreeable arrangement) Oh easily enough
Conveniently enough—a lash a piece
Each in your turn you can have em one by one

Xan That s right (*Putting himself in an attitude to receive the blow*) Now mind if ye see me flinch or swerve

Æacus (striking Xanthias) I ve struck you

Xan No by Zeus! I never felt it

Æacus Well then I ll beat this other fellow (*Striking Bacchus*)

Ba When?

Æacus I ve struck already

Bac And I didn t even sneeze?

Æacus No answer there I ll try the other again (*Striking Xanthias*)

Xan Won t you ever stop? Oh woe!

Æacus What! Woe?
Were you hurt then?

Xan No by Zeus I was only thinking
Of my feast of Hercules in Diomea

Æacus Holy man I must go back to the other one again

Bac Ho! Ho!

Æacus What s that?

Bac I saw some horsemen

Æacus But what are you weeping for?

Bac I m smelling onions.

Æacus And you don t mind the blows at all?
Bac Oh not at all
Æacus Well here we go back to the other one.
Xan Oh ouch!
Æacus What s that?
Xan (*lifting his foot*) Pull out this thorn
Æacus What a job this is! I ll try the other again
Bac Apollo! (*a cry which he continues as if it were a quotation*) thou of Delos and of Pytho
Xan He s hurt Didn t you hear him?
Bac Me? Not I!
I just remembered a verse from Hipponax
Xan (*to Æacus*) You re getting nowhere Beat him on the flanks
Æacus No by Zeus here s better Turn up your belly
Bac Poseidon!
Xan There he s flinching Did you hear him?
Bac (*continuing the quotation from Sophocles*)
Who rulest the Ægean peaks and streams
And over the depths of the sea
Æacus Well after all my pains I m quite at a loss
To discover which is the true real deity
By the Holy Goddess—I m completely puzzled
I must take you before Proserpine and Pluto
Being gods themselves they re likeliest to know
Bac Why that s a lucky thought I only wish
It had happen d to occur before you beat us

CHORUS

Muse attend our solemn summons
And survey the assembled commons
Congregated as they sit
An enormous mass of wit

—Full of genius taste, and fire,
Jealous pride and critic ire—
Cleophon among the rest
(Like the swallow from her nest
A familiar foreign bird)
Chatters loud and will be heard
(With the accent and the grace
Which he brought with him from Thrace)
But we fear the tuneful strain
Will be turn d to grief and pain
He must sing a dirge perforce
When his trial takes its course
We shall hear him moan and wail
Like the plaintive nightingale

EPIRREMA

It behoves the sacred Chorus and of right to them belongs
To suggest the best advice in their addresses and their songs
In performance of our office we present with all humility
A proposal for removing groundless fears and disability
First that all that were inveigled into Phrynichus s treason
Should be suffer d and received by rules of evidence and reason
To clear their conduct—Secondly that none of our Athenian race
Should live suspected and subjected to loss of franchise and disgrace
Feeling it a grievous scandal when a single naval fight
Renders foreigners and slaves partakers of the city s right

—*Not that we condemn the measure we conceived it* wisely done
As a just and timely measure, and the first and only one
—But your kinsmen and your comrades those with whom you fought and bore
Danger hardship and fatigue, or with their fathers long before
Struggling on the land and ocean labouring with the spear and oar
—These we think as they profess repentance for their past behaviour
Might by your exalted wisdom be received to grace and favour
Better it would be believe us casting off revenge and pride
To receive as friends and kinsmen all that combat on our side
Into full and equal franchise on the other hand we fear
If your hearts are fill d with fancies haughty captious and severe
While the shock of instant danger threatens shipwreck to the state
Such resolves will be lamented and repented of too late.

If the Muse forsees at all
What in future will befall
Dirty Cleigenes the small—
He, the sovereign of the bath
Will not long escape from scath
But must perish by and by
With his potash and his lye
With his realm and dynasty

His terraqueous scouring ball
And his washes one and all
Therefore he can never cease
To declaim against a peace

ANTEPIRREMA

Often times have we reflected on a similar abuse
In the choice of men for office and of coins for common use
For your old and standard pieces valued and approved and tried
Here among the Grecian nations and in all the world beside
Recognised in every realm for trusty stamp and pure assay
Are rejected and abandon d for the trash of yesterday
For a vile adulterate issue drossy counterfeit and base
Which the traffic of the city passes current in their place!
And the men that stood for office noted for acknowl edged worth
And for manly deeds of honour and for honourable birth
Train d in exercise and art in sacred dances and in song
All are ousted and supplanted by a base ignoble throng
Paltry stamp and vulgar mettle raise them to command and place
Brazen counterfeit pretenders, scoundrels of a scoundrel race
Whom the state in former ages scarce would have allow d to stand,
At the sacrifice of outcasts as the scape-goats of the land
—Time it is—and long has been, renouncing all your follies past,

And they—being quite transported and delighted
With his equivocations and evasions
His subtleties and niceties and quibbles—
In short—they raised an uproar and declared him
Archpoet by a general acclamation
And he with this grew proud and confident
And laid a claim to the seat where Æschylus sat

Xan And did not he get pelted for his pains?

Æacus (*with the dry concise importance of superior local information*)
Why no—The mob call d out and it was carried
To have a public trial of skill between them

Xan You mean the mob of scoundrels that you mention d?

Æacus Scoundrels indeed! Ay scoundrels without number

Xan But Æschylus must have had good friends and hearty?

Æacus Yes but good men are scarce both here and elsewhere

Xan Well what has Pluto settled to be done?

Æacus To have an examination and a trial
In public

Xan But how comes it?—Sophocles?—
Why does he not put forth his claim amongst them?

Æacus No no!—He s not the kind of man—not he!
I tell ye the first moment that he came,
He went up to Æschylus and saluted him
And kiss d his cheek and took his hand quite kindly
And Æschylus edged a little from his seat
To give him room so now the story goes,
(At least I had it from Cleidemides)

He means to attend there as a stander-by
Proposing to take up the conqueror
If Æschylus gets the better well and good
He gives up his pretensions—but if not
He ll stand a trial he says against Euripides

Xan There'll be strange doings

Æacus That there will—and shortly
—Here—in this place—strange things I promise you
A kind of thing that no man could have thought of
Why you ll see poetry weigh d out and measured

Xan What, will they bring their tragedies to the steel yards?

Æacus Yes will they—with their rules and compasses
They ll measure and examine and compare
And bring their plummets and their lines and levels
To take the bearings—for Euripides
Says that he ll make a survey word by word

Xan Æschylus takes the thing to heart I doubt.

Æacus He bent his brows and pored upon the ground I saw him

Xan Well but who decides the business?

Æacus Why there the difficulty lies—for judges
True learned judges are grown scarce and Æschyl
Objected to the Athenians absolutely

Xan Considering them as rogues and villains mostl;

Æacus As being ignorant and empty generally
And in their judgment of the stage particularly
In fine, they ve fix d upon that master of yours,
As having had some practice in the business.
But we must wait within—for when our masters
Are warm and eager stripes and blows ensue.

CHORUS

The full mouth d master of the tragic quire
We shall behold him foam with rage and ire
—*Confronting in the list*
His eager shrewd sharp tooth d antagonist
Then will his visual orbs be wildly whirl d
And huge invectives will be hurl d
  Superb and supercilious
  Atrocious atrabilious
With furious gesture and with lips of foam
And lion crest unconscious of the comb
Erect with rage—his brow s impending gloom
O ershadowing his dark eyes terrific blaze
  The opponent dexterous and wary
  Will fend and parry
While masses of conglomerated phrase,
  Enormous ponderous and pedantic
  With indignation frantic,
  And strength and force gigantic,
    Are desperately sped
    At his devoted head—
Then in different style
The touchstone and the file,
And subleties of art
In turn will play their part
Analysis and rule
And every modern tool
With critic scratch and scribble,
And nice invidious nibble
Contending for the important choice,
A vast expenditure of human voice!

Scene EURIPIDES BACCHUS ÆSCHYLUS

Eur Dont give me your advice I claim the seat
As being a better and superior artist

Bac What, Æschylus dont you speak? you hear his language

Eur He s mustering up a grand commanding visage
—A silent attitude—the common trick
That he begins with in his tragedies

Bac Come have a care my friend—You ll say too much

Eur I know the man of old—I ve scrutinised
And shown him long ago for what he is
A rude unbridled tongue a haughty spirit
Proud arrogant and insolently pompous
Rough clownish boisterous and overbearing

Æs Say st thou me so? Thou bastard of the earth
With thy patch d robes and rags of sentiment
Raked from the streets and stitch d and tack d together?
Thou mumping whining beggarly hypocrite!
But you shall pay for it

Bac (*in addressing Æschylus attempts to speak in more elevated style*) There now Æschylus
You grow too warm Restrain your ireful mood

Æs Yes but I ll seize that sturdy beggar first
And search and strip him bare of his pretensions

Bac Quick! Quick! A sacrifice to the winds—Make ready
The storm of rage is gathering Bring a victim

Æs —A wretch that has corrupted everything
Our music with his melodies from Crete
Our morals with incestuous tragedies

Bac Dear worthy Æschylus contain yourself
And as for you Euripides move off
This instant if you re wise I give you warning

Or else with one of his big thumping phrases
You ll get your brains dash d out and all your notions
And sentiments and matter mash d to pieces
—And thee most noble Æschylus (*as above*) I beseech
With mild demeanour calm and affable
To hear and answer —For it ill beseems
Illustrious bards to scold like market women
But you roar out and bellow like a furnace

Eur (*in the tone of a town blackguard working himself up for a quarrel*)
I m up to it —I m resolved and here I stand
Ready and steady—take what course you will
Let him be first to speak or else let me
I ll match my plots and characters against him
My sentiments and language, and what not
Ay! and my music too my Meleager
My Æolus and my Telephus and all.

Bac Well Æschylus —determine. What say you?

Æs (*speaks in a tone of grave manly despondency*)
I wish the place of trial had been elsewhere,
I stand at disadvantage here

Bac As how?

Æs Because my poems live on earth above,
And his died with him and descended here,
And are at hand as ready witnesses
But you decide the matter I submit

Bac (*with official pertness and importance*)
Come—let them bring me fire and frankincense,
That I may offer vows and make oblations
For any ingenious critical conclusion
To this same elegant and clever trial—
(*To the Chorus*)
And you too —sing me a hymn there —To the Muses

CHORUS

To the Heavenly Nine we petition
Ye, that on earth or in air are for ever kindly protecting the vagaries of learned ambition
And at your ease from above our sense and folly directing (or poetical contests inspecting
Deign to behold for a while as a scene of amusing attention all the struggles of style and invention)
Aid and assist and attend and afford to the furious authors your refined and enlighten d suggestions
Grant them ability—force and agility quick recollections and address in their answers and questions
Pithy replies with a word to the wise and pulling and hauling with inordinate uproar and bawling
Driving and drawing like carpenters sawing their dramas asunder
With suspended sense and wonder
All are waiting and attending
On the conflict now depending!

Bac Come say your prayers you two before the trial
[*Æschylus offers incense*

Æs O Ceres nourisher of my soul maintain me
A worthy follower of thy mysteries

Bac (*to Euripides*) There, you there make your offering

Eur Well I will
But I direct myself to other deities

Bac Hey what? Your own? some new ones?

Eur Most assuredly!

Bac Well! Pray away then—to your own new deities.
[*Euripides offers incense*

Eur Thou foodful Air the nurse of all notions
And ye, the organic powers of sense and speech,

And keen refined olfactory discernment
Assist my present search for faults and errors

CHORUS

Here beside you here are we
Eager all to hear and see
This abstruse and mighty battle
Of profound and learned prattle.
—But as it appears to me
Thus the course of it will be
He the junior and appellant
Will advance as the assailant
Aiming shrewd satyric darts
At his rival s noble parts
And with sallies sharp and keen
Try to wound him in the spleen
While the veteran rends and raises
Rifted rough uprooted phrases
Wielded like a threshing staff
Scattering the dust and chaff

Bac Come now begin dispute away but first I give you notice
That every phrase in your discourse must be refined avoiding
Vulgar absurd comparisons and awkward silly joking

Eur At the first outset I forbear to state my own pretensions
Hereafter I shall mention them when his have been refuted
After I shall have fairly shown how he befool d and cheated

The rustic audience that he found which Phrynichus bequeathed him

He planted first upon the stage a figure veil d and muffled

An Achilles or a Niobe that never show d their faces

But kept a tragic attitude without a word to utter

Bac No more they did tis very true

Eur —In the meanwhile the Chorus

Strung on ten strophes right an-end but they remain d in silence

Bac I liked that silence well enough as well perhaps or better

Than those new talking characters—

Eur That s from your want of judgment, Believe me

Bac Why perhaps it is but what was his intention?

Eur Why mere conceit and insolence to keep the people waiting

Till Niobe should deign to speak to drive his drama forward

Bac O what a rascal Now I see the tricks he used to play me

[*To Æschylus who is showing signs of indignation by various contortions*

—What makes you writhe and winch about?—

Eur Because he feels my censures

—Then having dragg d and drawl d along half way to the conclusion

He foisted in a dozen words of noisy boisterous accent,

With lofty plumes and shaggy brows, mere bugbear of the language.

That no man ever heard before.—

Æs Alas! alas!

Bac (*to Æschylus*) Have done there!

Eur He never used a simple word

Bac (*to Æschylus*) Don t grind your teeth so strangely

Eur But Bulwarks and Scamanders and Hippogrifs and *Gorgons*
On burnish d shields emboss d in brass bloody remorse less phrases
Which nobody could understand

Bac Well I confess for my part,
I used to keep awake at night with guesses and conjec tures
To think what kind of foreign bird he meant by griffin horses.

Æs A figure on the heads of ships you goose you must have seen them

Bac Well from the likeness *I declare I took it for Eruxis*

Eur So! Figures from the heads of ships art fit for tragic diction

Æs Well then—thou paltry wretch explain What were your own devices?

Eur Not stories about flying stags like yours and griffin horses
Nor terms nor images derived from tapestry Persian hangings
When I received the Muse from you I found her puff'd and pamper d
With pompous sentences and terms a cumbrous huge virago
My first attention was applied to make her look genteelly
And bring her to a slighter shape by dint of lighter diet
I fed her with plain household phrase, and cool familiar salad
With water gruel episode with sentimental jelly

With moral mincemeat till at length I brought her into compass
Cephisophon who was my cook, contrived to make them relish
I kept my plots distinct and clear and to prevent confusion
My leading characters rehearsed their pedigrees for prologues.

Æs 'Twas well, at least, that you forbore to quote your own extraction

Eur From the first opening of the scene, all persons were in action
The master spoke, the slave replied the women young and old ones
All had their equal share of talk—

Æs Come, then stand forth and tell us,
What forfeit less than death is due for such an innovation?

Eur I did it upon principle from democratic motives

Bac Take care my friend—upon that ground your footing is but ticklish

Eur I taught these youths to speechify

Æs I say so too —Moreover
I say that—for the public good—you ought to have been hang d first.

Eur The rules and forms of rhetoric —the laws of composition,
To prate—to state—and in debate to meet a question fairly
At a dead lift to turn and shift—to make a nice distinction

Æs I grant it all—I make it all—my ground of

Eur The whole in cases and concerns occurring and recurring
At every turn and every day domestic and familiar
So that the audience one and all from personal experience
Were competent to judge the piece and form a fair opinion
Whether my scenes and sentiments agreed with truth and nature
I never took them by surprise to storm their understandings
With Memnons and Tydides s and idle rattle trappings
Of battle steeds and clattering shields to scare them from their senses
But for a test (perhaps the best) our pupils and adherents
May be distinguish d instantly by person and behaviour
His are Phormisius the rough Meganetes the gloomy
Hobgoblin headed trumpet mouth d grim visaged ugly bearded
But mine are Cleitophon the smooth—Theramenes the gentle

Bac Theramenes—a clever hand a universal genius
I never found him at a loss in all the turns of party
To change his watchword at a word or at a moment s warning

Eur Thus it was that I began
With a nicer neater plan
Teaching men to look about
Both within doors and without
To direct their own affairs
And their house and household wares
Marking everything amiss—
"Where is that? and—What is this?

"This is broken—that is gone."
'Tis the modern style and tone
Bac Yes by Jove—and at their homes
Nowadays each master comes
Of a sudden bolting in
With an uproar and a din
Rating all the servants round
If it s lost it must be found
Why was all the garlic wasted?
There that honey has been tasted
And these olives pilfer d here
Where s the pot we bought last year?
What s become of all the fish?
Which of you has broke the dis 1?
Thus it is but heretofore
The moment that they cross d the door
They sat them down to doze and snore

CHORUS

Noble Achilles! you see the disaster
The shame and affront and an enemy nigh!"
Oh! bethink thee mighty master
Think betimes of your reply
Yet beware lest anger force
Your hasty chariot from the course
Grievous charges have been heard
With many a sharp and bitter word
Notwithstanding mighty chief
Let Prudence fold her cautious reef
In your anger s swelling sail
By degrees you may prevail
But beware of your behaviour
Till the wind is in your favour

Now for your answer illustrious architect
Founder of lofty theatrical lays!
Patron in chief of our tragical trumperies!
Open the floodgate of figure and phrase!

Æs My spirit is kindled with anger and shame
To so base a competitor forced to reply
But I needs must retort or the wretch will report
That he left me refuted and foil d in debate
Tell me then What are the principal merits
Entitling a poet to praise and renown?
Eur The improvement of morals the progress of mind
When a poet by skill and invention
Can render his audience virtuous and wise
Æs But if you by neglect or intention
Have done the reverse and from brave honest spirits
Depraved and have left them degraded and base,
Tell me what punishment ought you to suffer?
Bac Death to be sure!—Take that answer from me
Æs Observe then and mark what our citizens were
When first from my care they were trusted to you
Not scoundrel informers or paltry buffoons
Evading the services due to the state
But with hearts all on fire for adventure and war
Distinguished for hardiness stature and strength
Breathing forth nothing but lances and darts
Arms and equipment and battle array
Bucklers and shields, and habergeons and hauberks
Helmets and plumes and heroic attire
Bac There he goes hammering on with his helmets
He ll be the death of me one of these days
Eur But how did you manage to make em so manly
What was the method the means that you took?

Bac Speak Æschylus speak and behave yourself better
And don t in your rage stand so silent and stern
Æs A drama brimful with heroical spirit
Eur What did you call it?
Æs The Chiefs against Thebes"
That inspired each spectator with martial ambition
Courage and ardour and prowess, and pride
Bac But you did very wrong to encourage the Thebans
Indeed you deserve to be punish d you do
For the Thebans are grown to be capital soldiers
You ve done us a mischief by that very thing
Æs The fault was your own if you took other courses
The lesson I taught was directed to you
Then I gave you the glorious theme of the Persians
Replete with sublime patriotical strains
The record and example of noble achievement
The delight of the city the pride of the stage
Bac I rejoiced I confess when the tidings were carried
To old King Darius so long dead and buried
And the chorus in concert kept wringing their hands,
Weeping and wailing and crying Alas!
Æs Such is the duty the task of a poet,
Fulfilling in honour his office and trust.
Look to traditional history—look
To antiquity primitive early remote
See there, what a blessing illustrious poets
Conferred on mankind in the centuries past
Orpheus instructed mankind in religion
Reclaim d them from bloodshed and barbarous rites
Musæus deliver d the doctrine of medicine,
And warnings prophetic for ages to come
Next came old Hesiod teaching us husbandry
Ploughing and sowing and rural affairs,

Rural economy rural astronomy
Homely morality labour and thrift
Homer himself our adorable Homer
What was his title to praise and renown?
What but the worth of the lessons he taught us
Discipline arms and equipment of war?

Bac Yes but Pantacles *was never the wiser*
For in the procession he ought to have led
When his helmet was tied he kept puzzling and tried
To fasten the crest on the crown of his head

Æs But other brave warriors and noble commanders
Were train d in his lessons to valour and skill
Such was the noble heroical Lamachus
Others besides were instructed by him
And I from his fragments ordaining a banquet
Furnish d and deck d with majestical phrase
Brought forward the models of ancient achievement
Teucer Patroclus and chiefs of antiquity
Raising and rousing Athenian hearts
When the signal of onset was blown in their ear
With a similar ardour to dare and to do
But I never allow d of your lewd Sthenobœas
Or filthy detestable Phædras—not I—
Indeed I should doubt if my drama throughout
Exhibit an instance of woman in love

Eur No you were too stern for an amorous turn
For Venus and Cupid too stern and too stupid

Æs May they leave me at rest and with peace in my breast,
And infest and pursue your kindred and you
With the very *same blow that despatch d you below*

Bac That was well enough said with the life that he led
He himself in the end got a wound from a friend

Eur But what after all, is the horrible mischief?

My poor Sthenobœas what harm have they done?
Æs The example is followed the practice has gain d
And women of family fortune and worth
Bewilder d with shame in a passionate fury
Have poison d themselves for Bellerophon s sake
Eur But at least you'll allow that I never invented it
Phædra s affair was a matter of fact
Æs A fact with a vengeance! but horrible facts
Should be buried in silence, not bruited abroad
Nor brought forth on the stage nor emblazon d in poetry,
Children and boys have a teacher assign d them—
The bard is a master for manhood and youth
Bound to instruct them in virtue and truth
Beholden and bound
Eur But is virtue a sound?
Can any mysterious virtue be found
In bombastical huge hyperbolical phrase?
Æs Thou dirty calamitous wretch recollect
That exalted ideas of fancy require
To be clothed in a suitable vesture of phrase
And that heroes and gods may be fairly supposed
Discoursing in words of a mightier import
More lofty by far than the children of man
As the pomp of apparel assign d to their persons,
Produced on the stage and presented to view
Surpasses in dignity splendour and lustre
Our popular garb and domestic attire,
A practice which nature and reason allow
But which you disannull d and rejected
Eur As how?
Æs When you brought forth your kings in a villainous fashion
In patches and rags as a claim for compassion

Eur And this is a grave misdemeanour forsooth!
Æs It has taught an example of sordid untruth
For the rich of the city that ought to equip
And to serve with a ship are appealing to pity
Pretending distress—with an overworn dress
Bac By Jove so they do with a waistcoat brand new
Worn closely within warm and new for the skin
And if they escape in this beggarly shape
You ll meet em at market I warrant em all
Buying the best at the fishmonger s stall
Æs He has taught every soul to sophisticate truth
And debauch d all the bodies and minds of the youth
Leaving them morbid and pallid and spare
And the places of exercise vacant and bare—
The disorder has spread to the fleet and the crew
The service is ruin d and ruin d by you—
With prate and debate in a mutinous state
Whereas in my day twas a different way
Nothing they said nor knew nothing to say
But to call for their porridge and cry Pull away"
Bac Yes—yes they knew this
How to f in the teeth
Of the rower beneath
And befoul their own comrades
And pillage ashore
But now they forget the command of the oar—
Prating and splashing
Discussing and dashing
They steer here and there
With their eyes in the air
Hither and thither
Nobody knows whither
Æs Can the reprobate mark in the course he has run,
One crime unattempted a mischief undone?

With his horrible passions of sisters and brothers,
And sons in laws tempted by villainous mothers,
And temples defiled with a bastardly birth
And women divested of honour or worth
That talk about life as a death upon earth
And sophistical frauds and rhetorical bawds
Till now the whole state is infested with tribes
Of scriveners and scribblers and rascally scribes—
All practice of masculine vigour and pride
Our wrestling and running are all laid aside,
And we see that the city can hardly provide
For the Feast of the Founders a racer of force
To carry the torch and accomplish a course

Bac Well I laugh d till I cried
The *last festival tide*
At the fellow that ran—
'Twas a heavy fat man
And he panted and hobbled
And stumbled and wabbled
And the pottery people about the gate,
Seeing him hurried and tired and late,
Stood to receive him in open rank
Helping him on with a hearty spank
Over the shoulder and over the flank
The flank *the loin the back the shoulders*
With shouts of applause from all beholders
While he ran on with a filthy fright
Puffing his link to keep it alight

CHORUS

Ere the prize is lost and won
Mighty doings will be done
Now then—(though to judge aright
Is difficult, when force and might

Are opposed with ready slight
When the Champion that is cast
Tumbles uppermost at last)
—Since you meet in equal match
Argue contradict and scratch
Scuffle and abuse and bite
Tear and fight
With all your wits and all your might
—Fear not for a want of sense
Or judgment in your audience
That defect has been removed
They re prodigiously improved
Disciplined alert and smart
Drill d and exercised in art
Each has got a little book
In the which they read and look
Doing all their best endeavour
To be critical and clever
Thus their own ingenious natures
  Aided and improved by learning
Will provide you with spectators
  Shrewd attentive and discerning

Terrestrial Hermes with supreme espial
Inspector of that old paternal realm
Aid and assist me now you suppliant,
Revisiting and returning to my country!

Eur It is not justly express d since he return d
Clandestinely without authority
Bac That s well remark d but I don t comprehend it.
Eur (*tauntingly and coolly*)
Proceed—Continue!

Bac (*jealous of his authority*) Yes you must continue,
Æschylus I command you to continue
(*To Euripides*)
And you keep a look-out and mark his blunders
Æs From his sepulchral mound I call my father
To listen and hear —
Eur There s a tautology!
To listen and hear—
Bac Why don t you see you ruffian!
It s a dead man he s calling to—Three times
We call to em but they can t be made to hear
Æs And you your prologues of what kind were they?
Eur I ll show ye and if you ll point out a tautology
Or a single word clapt in to botch a verse—
That s all!—I ll give you leave to spit upon me
Bac (*with an absurd air of patience and resignation*)
Well I can t help myself I m bound to attend
Begin then with these same fine spoken prologues
Eur Œdipus was at first a happy man
Æs Not he by Jove!—but born to misery
Predicted and predestined by an oracle
Before his birth to murder his own father!
—Could he have been at first a happy man?
Eur But afterwards became a wretched mortal
Æs By no means! he continued to be wretched
—Born wretched and exposed as soon as born
Upon a potsherd in a winter s night
Brought up a foundling with disabled feet
Then married—a young man to an aged woman
That proved to be his mother—whereupon
He tore his eyes out.
Bac To complete his happiness,
He ought to have served at sea with Erasinides

There!—that s enough—now come to music can t ye?

Eur I mean it I shall now proceed to expose him
As a bad composer awkward uninventive
Repeating the same strain perpetually—

CHORUS

I stand in wonder and perplext
To think of what will follow next
Will he dare to criticise
The noble bard that did devise
Our oldest boldest harmonies
Whose mighty music we revere?
Much I marvel much I fear—

Eur Mighty fine music truly! I ll give ye a sample
It s every inch cut out to the same pattern

Bac I ll mark—I ve pick d these pebbles up for counters

Eur *Noble Achilles! Forth to the rescue!*
Forth to the rescue with ready support!
Hasten and go
There is havoc and woe,
Hasty defeat
And a bloody retreat,
Confusion and rout
And the terrible shout
Of a conquering foe
Tribulation and woe!

Bac Whoh hoh there! we ve *had woes enough* I reckon
Therefore I ll go to wash away my woe
In a warm bath

Eur No do pray wait an instant
And let me give you first another strain
Transferr d to the stage from music to the lyre

Bac Proceed then—only give us no more woes

Eur The supremacy sceptre and haughty command
Of the Grecian land—with a flatto-flatto-flatto-thrat—
And the ravenous sphinx with her horrible brood
Thirsting for blood—with a flatto-flatto-flatto-thrat,
And armies equipt for a vengeful assault
For Paris s fault—with a flatto-flatto-flatto-thrat

Bac What herb is that same flatto-thrat? some simple,
I guess you met with in the field of Marathon
—But such a tune as this! you must have learnt it
From fellows hauling buckets at the well

Æs Such were the strains I purified and brought
To just perfection—taught by Phrynichus
Not copying him but culling other flowers
From those fair meadows which the Muses love—
—But he filches and begs adapts and borrows
Snatches of tunes from minstrels in the street
Strumpets and vagabonds—the lullabys
Of nurses and old women—jigs and ballads—
I ll give ye a proof—Bring me a lyre here somebody
What signifies a lyre? the castanets
Will suit him better—Bring the castanets
With Euripides s Muse to snap her fingers
In cadence to her master s compositions

Bac This Muse I take it, is a Lesbian Muse.

Æs Gentle halcyons ye that lave
Your snowy plume
Sporting on the summer wave
Ye too that around the room
On the rafters of the roofs
Strain aloft your airy woof
Ye spiders spiders ever spinning,
Never ending still beginning—

Where the dolphin loves to follow
Weltering in the surge s hollow
Dear to Neptune and Apollo
By the seamen understood
Ominous of harm or good
In capricious eager sallies
Chasing racing round the galleys
Well now Do you see this?

Bac I see it—[*After which Æschylus turns to his antagonist*]

Such is vour music I shall now proceed
To give a specimen of your monodies—
O dreary shades of night!
What phantoms of affright
Have scared my troubled sense
With saucer eyes immense
And huge horrific paws
With bloody claws!
Ye maidens haste and bring
From the fair spring
A bucket of fresh water whose clear stream
May purify me from this dreadful dream
But oh! my dream is out!
Ye maidens search about!
O mighty powers of mercy can it be
That Glyke Glyke she
(My friend and civil neighbour heretofore)
Has robb d my henroost of its feather d store?
With the dawn I was beginning
Spinning spinning spinning spinning
Unconscious of the meditated crime
Meaning to sell my yarn at market time.

Now tears alone are left me,
My neighbour hath bereft me,
Of all—of all—of all—all but a tear!
Since he my faithful trusty chanticleer
Is flown—is flown!—Is gone—is gone!
—But O ye nymphs of sacred Ida bring
Torches and bows with arrows on the string
And search around
All the suspected ground
And thou fair huntress of th sky
Deign to attend descending from on high—
—While Hecate with her tremendous torch
Even from the topmost garret to the porch
Explores the premises with search exact
To find the thief and ascertain the fact—

Bac Come no more songs!

Æs I ve had enough of em
For my part *I shall bring him to the balance,*
As a true test of our poetic merit
To prove the weight of our respective verses

Bac Well then so be it—if it must be so
That I m to stand here like a cheesemonger
Retailing poetry with a pair of scales.

[*A huge pair of scales are here discovered on the stage*

CHORUS

Curious eager wits pursue
Strange devices quaint and new
Like the scene you witness here,
Unaccountable and queer
I myself if merely told it
If I did not here behold it,

Should have deem d it utter folly
Craziness and nonsense wholly

Bac Move up stand close to the balance!
Eur Here are we—
Bac Take hold now and each of you repeat a verse
And don t leave go before I call to you!
Eur We re ready
Bac Now then each repeat a verse
Eur I wish that Argo with her woven wings
Æs O streams of Sperchius and ye pastured plains
Bac Let go!—See now—this scale outweighs that other
Very considerably—
Eur How did it happen?
Bac He slipp d a river in like the wool jobbers
To moisten his metre—but your line was light
A thing with wings—ready to fly away
Eur Let him try once again then and take hold
Bac Take hold once more
Eur We re ready
Bac Now repeat
Eur Speech is the temple and altar of persuasion
Æs Death is a God that loves no sacrifice
Bac Let go!—See there again! This scale sinks down
No wonder that it should with Death put into it
The heaviest of all calamities
Eur But I put in persuasion finely express d
In the best terms
Bac Perhaps so but persuasion
Is soft and light and silly—Think of something
That s heavy and huge to outweigh him something solid.
Eur Let s see—Where have I got it? Something solid?
Bac Achilles has thrown twice—Twice a deuce ace!"

Come now one trial more this is the last
Eur He grasp d a mighty mace of massy weight"
Æs Cars upon cars and corpses heap d pell mell"
Bac He has nick d you again—
Eur Why so? What has he done?
Bac He had *heap d ye up cars and corpses such a load*
As twenty Egyptian labourers could not carry—
Æs Come no more single lines—let him bring all
His wife his children his Cephisophon
His books and everything himself to boot—
I ll counterpoise them with a couple of lines
Bac Well they re both friends of mine—I shan t decide
To get myself ill will from either party
One of them seems extraordinary clever
And the other suits my taste particularly
Pluto Won t you decide then and conclude the business?
Bac Suppose then I decide what then?
Pluto Then take him
Away with you whichever you prefer
As a present for your pains in coming down here
Bac Heaven bless ye—Well—let s see now—Can t ye *advise me?*
This is the case—I m come in search of a poet—
Pluto With what design?
Bac With this design to see
The City again restored to peace and wealth
Exhibiting tragedies in a proper style.
—Therefore whichever gives the best advice
On public matters I shall take him with me.
—First then of Alcibiades, what think ye?
The City is in hard labour with the question.
Eur What are her sentiments towards him?
Bac What?

She loves and she detests and longs to have him
But tell me both of you your own opinions
| *Eur* (*Euripides and Æschylus speak each in his own tragical style*) I hate the man that in his country s service
Is slow but ready and quick to work her harm
Unserviceable except to serve himself
Bac Well said by Jove!—Now you—Give us a sentence
Æs 'Tis rash and idle policy to foster
A lion s whelp within the city walls
But when he s rear d and grown you must indulge him
Bac By Jove then I m quite puzzled one of them
Has answer d clearly and the other sensibly
But give us both of ye one more opinion
—What means are left of safety for the state?
Eur To tack Cinesias like a pair of wings
To Cleocritus shoulders and dispatch them
From a precipice to sail across the seas
Bac It seems a joke but there s some sense in it
Eur Then being both equipp d with little cruets
They might co-operate in a naval action
By sprinkling vinegar in the enemies eyes
—But I can tell you and will
Bac Speak and explain then—
Eur If we mistrust where present trust is placed
Trusting in what was heretofore mistrusted—
Bac How! What? I m at a loss—Speak it again
Not quite so learnedly—more plainly and simply
Eur If we withdraw the confidence we placed
In these our present statesmen and transfer it
To those whom we mistrusted heretofore
This seems I think our fairest chance for safety
If with our present counsellors we fail

Then with their opposites we might succeed
Bac That s capitally said my Palamedes!
My politician! was it all your own?
Your own invent on?
Eur All except the cruets
That was a notion of Cephisophon s
Bac (*to Æschylus*) Now you—what say you?
Æs Inform me about the city—
What kind of persons has she placed in office?
Does she promote the worthiest?
Bac No not she
She can t abide em
Æs Rogues then she prefers?
Bac Not altogether she makes use of em
Perforce as it were
Æs Then who can hope to save
A state so wayward and perverse that finds
No sort of habit fitted for her wear?
Drugget or superfine nothing will suit her!
Bac Do think a little how she can be saved
Æs Not here when I return there, I shall speak
Bac No do pray send some good advice before you
Æs When they regard their lands as enemy s ground
Their enemy s possessions as their own
Their seamen and the fleet their only safeguard,
Their sole resource hardship and poverty
And resolute endurance in distress—
Bac That s well—but juries eat up everything
And we shall lose our supper if we stay
Pluto Decide then—
Bac You ll decide for your own selves
I ll make a choice according to my fancy
Eur Remember then your oath to your poor friend

And as you swore and promised rescue me
Bac It was my tongue that swore —I fix on Æschylus
Eur O wretch! what have you done?
Bac Me? done? What should I?
Voted for Æschylus to be sure—Why not?
Eur And after such a villainous act you dare
To view me face to face—Art not ashamed?
Bac Why shame in point of fact is nothing real
Shame is the apprehension of a vision
Reflected from the surface of opinion—
—The opinion of the public—they must judge
Eur O cruel!—Will you abandon me to death?
Bac Why perhaps death is life and life is death
And victuals and drink an illusion of the senses
For what is Death but an eternal sleep?
And does not Life consist in sleeping and eating?
Pluto Now Bacchus you ll come here with us within
Bac (*a little startled and alarmed*)
What for?
Pluto To be received and entertain d
With a feast before you go
Bac That s well imagined
With all my heart—I ve not the least objection

Chorus

Happy is the man possessing
The superior holy blessing
Of a judgment and a taste
Accurate refined and chaste
As it plainly doth appear
In the scene presented here
Where the noble worthy Bard
Meets with a deserved reward

Suffer d to depart in peace
Freely with a full release,
To revisit once again
His kindred and his countrymen—
Hence moreover
You discover
That to sit with Socrates
In a dream of learned ease
Quibbling counter-quibbling prating
Argufying and debating
With the metaphysic sect,
Daily sinking in neglect
Growing careless incorrect
While the practice and the rules
Of the true poetic Schools
Are renounced or slighted wholly
Is a madness and a folly

PLUTO

Go forth with good wishes and hearty good will
And salute the good people on Pallas s hill
Let them hear and admire father Æschylus still
In his office of old which again he must fill
—You must guide and direct them
Instruct and correct them
With a lesson in verse,
For you ll find them much worse
Greater fools than before, and their folly much more.
And more numerous far than the blockheads of yore—
—And give Cleophon this
And bid him not miss,

But be sure to attend
To the summons I send
To Nicomachus too
And the rest of the crew
That devise and invent
  New taxes and tribute
Are summonses sent
  Which you ll mind to distribute
Bid them come to their graves
Or like runaway slaves
If they linger and fail
We shall drag them to jail
Down here in the dark
With a brand and a mark

Æs I shall do as you say
But the while I m away
Let the seat that I held
Be by Sophocles fill d
As deservedly reckon d
My pupil and second
In learning and merit
And tragical spirit—
And take special care
Keep that reprobate there
Far aloof from the Chair
Let him never sit in it
An hour or a minute
By chance or design
To profane what was mine

Pluto Bring forward the torches!—The Chorus shall wait
And attend on the Poet in triumph and state
With a thundering chaunt of majestical tone
To wish him farewell with a tune of his own

CHORUS

Now may the powers of the earth give a safe and speedy departure
To the Bard at his second birth with a prosperous happy revival
And may the city fatigued with wars and long revolution
At length be brought to return to just and wise resolutions
Long in peace to remain—Let restless Cleophon hasten
Far from amongst us here—since wars are his only diversion,
Thrace his native land will afford him wars in abundance